

# ArtReview



*future  
greats*

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An abstract painting by Anish Kapoor. The composition is dominated by dark, expressive brushstrokes in shades of black, dark red, and maroon. Interspersed among these dark tones are bright, glowing patches of light in white, yellow, and orange, creating a sense of depth and light within the dark space. The overall effect is one of a turbulent, energetic, and mysterious atmosphere.

Anish Kapoor

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*Esther Schipper*

A blurry, abstract background image of a landscape with a body of water and distant land.

Luc Tuymans

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Chris Hipkiss  
Francesco Ponte  
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Miroslav Tichý  
Type 42 (Anonymous)  
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Type 42 (Anonymous), Ursula Andress 37 22-35, 1960s-1970s  
Mixed media on photograph. 3 1/4 x 4 1/4 inches (8.3 x 10.8 cm)

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## Works 1973 - 1976

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# ANTONY GORMLEY

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PARIS PANTIN  
SALZBURG

GALERIE THADDAEUS ROPAC

PARIS MARAIS PARIS PANTIN SALZBURG

## In 1995.



September

East meets West: Yan Pei Ming is included in the Centennial 46th Venice Biennale, while Maurizio Cattelan and Carsten Höller participate in the first edition of the Gwangju Biennale.



October

Astronomical revolution: the first extrasolar planet, 51 Pegasi b, is discovered. Are Aliens with us, as Steven Claydon seems to suggest in one of his latest sculptures?



November

Massimo De Carlo shows John Armleder *Furniture sculptures*. 'Even if my works are in large scale, I try my best to hide them; they work as an open configuration served by one innocent hand, and a perverse one'.

The quote is thanks to John Armleder

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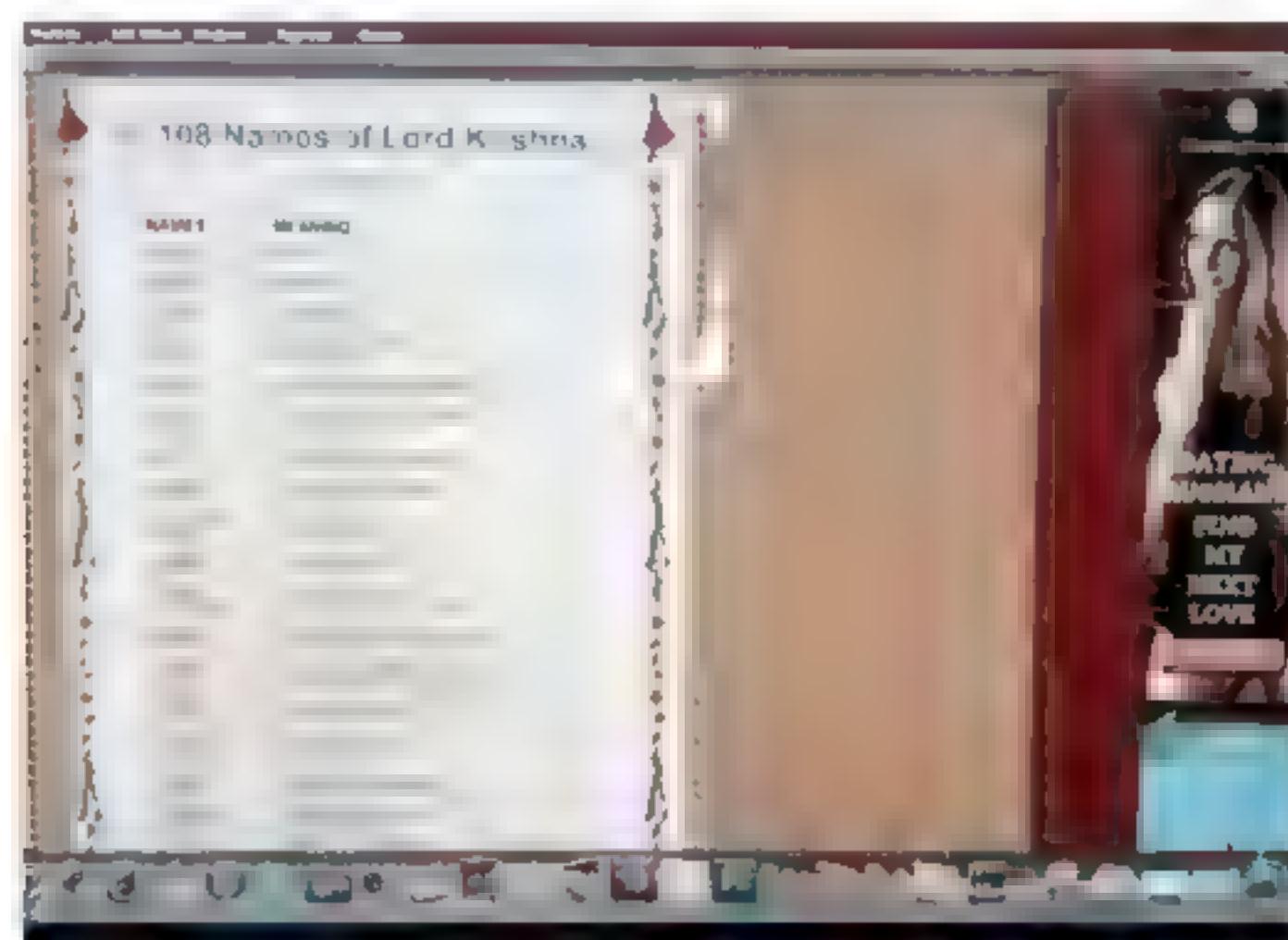
## The Future

So... this is the place where *ArtReview*, after four weeks of meditation and immersion in the spartan practices of its sect, located in the immense temple that ranges up the steep hills above the Thames, is supposed to tell you, each and every month, what's new in the world of art. And this month, in between memorising the 108 names of Lord Krishna (and avoiding the distractions offered by the less-than-spartan advertisements placed on the webpage on which the 108 names appear), *ArtReview* has been thinking deep. Or at least a lot.

Novelty, newness, the future, arrrgh... In case some of you haven't been paying attention, these are a few of the issues that have been bothering *ArtReview* over the past 12 months or so. Not that it has always bothered *you* with this, except over the last three issues, where it's been publishing a series of articles about 'the new' (by Michael North in December, Suhail Malik in January and J.J. Charlesworth in this issue). But it's been there since it read North's book on novelty in January of last year nonetheless.

All this is veering towards (yeah! Despite everything North and Malik had to say, *ArtReview* still maintains some sort of belief in progress) the fact that in many ways this issue marks the culmination of *ArtReview*'s obsession with ideas of 'the new'. Or more accurately, its obsession with contemporary art's obsession with novelty. In part that's because March is when *ArtReview* publishes its annual Future Greats issue – a guide to artists who are setting new agendas in relation to the role and social relevance of art. Or at least how a selected group of artists, critics and curators assign these values and see them playing out in art over the next few months. Although most of the time *ArtReview* isn't quite clear what we're implying by 'the future' in this context: whether or not we're talking about a time that's going to be different, an art that's going to look different or an endless present time in which, if you go by what's happening at auction houses and art fairs, it looks like the future will be a lot more of the same.

Naturally this 'future' stuff is related to the equally grey area of 'the new'. Sometimes that seems to be just another word for diversity, for looking at art from a region that's been less well trampled (yes, *ArtReview* is implying both repression and restriction here) by curators and art advisers; at other times it seems to relate to the effects of technological progress, cheap air travel and the Inter\*\*t; and occasionally it's simply a metaphor for the unexpected.



Less-than-spartan distractions

It sounds a bit like what *ArtReview*'s sister magazine, *ArtReview Asia*, was telling it about terms such as Southeast Asia or Asia Pacific, and about how no one seemed definitively to know what they meant. Even the people who lived within areas other people thought such terms defined. There was the question of whether or not Southeast Asia simply meant the ten countries that were members of the political and economic grouping ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), although that seemed like a definition that was at best circular. Perhaps Southeast Asia also included some islands governed by Australia. And maybe eastern Bangladesh, for cultural reasons. Or perhaps the whole thing simply represented a group of countries that had been particularly oppressed by their neighbours or various colonial powers. (BTW, did *ArtReview* tell you that it recently met someone who kept absolutely insisting that 'everyone' knew that Australia was a part of Asia? The guy runs a prominent London gallery – yeah *ArtReview* knows, English 'education' has suffered since the world stopped being one country ruled from Buckingham Palace.)

Anyway, the endpoint of all this – such as there is one – is that *ArtReview* began to think that its phase of trying to understand what everyone else is obsessed about (and the problems of language) is slowly being replaced by an obsession with things that might be worthwhile to be obsessed about. Which means, in the main, that *ArtReview* over the coming months is going to be looking at a whole 'new' new type of art, and the structures and organisations that surround it and make it possible. That and continuing to read *The Adventures of the Mad Monk Ji Gong* (the 'drunken wisdom of China's most famous Chan Buddhist monk'); his apparent rogue's knack for exposing the corrupt and criminal while pursuing the twin delights of enlightenment and intoxication sounds like exactly the kind of path the contemporary art critic on a mission such as this one needs to follow. OK, maybe that last bit is not so new, but it's certainly something to look forward to, which in some ways is the only purpose a future has. *ArtReview*



Dining for celebrities only

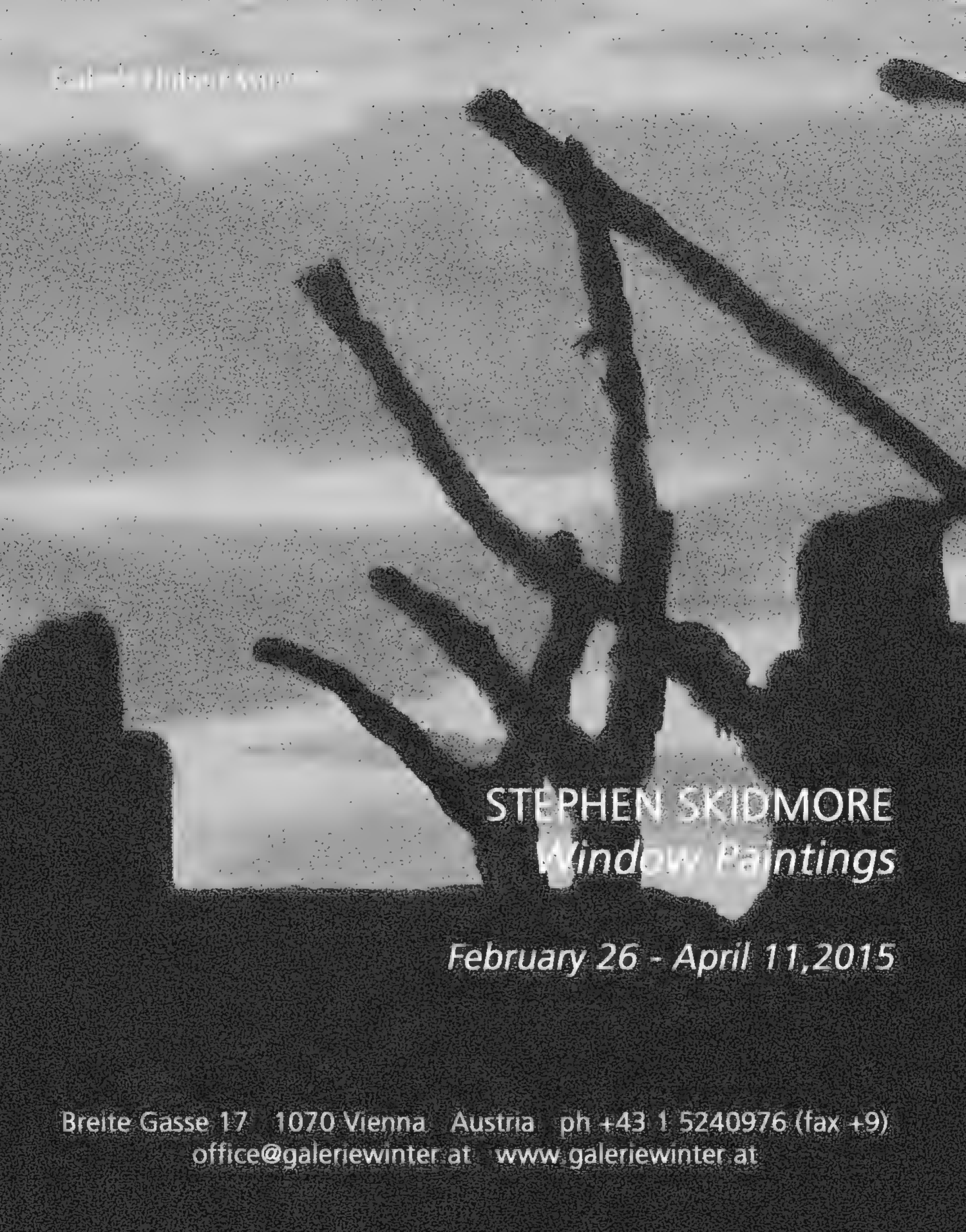


# Isamu Noguchi

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page 40 Juliette Blightman, Bolzano, 2015, c-print.  
Courtesy the artist and Isabella Bortolozzi Galerie, Berlin

Future Greats

Jarbas Lopes, *selected by Fernanda Gomes*  
Robert Davis, *selected by Rashid Johnson*  
Pia Camil, *selected by Gabriela Jauregui*  
Maeve Brennan, *selected by Phillip Lai*  
Vicky Wright, *selected by J.J. Charlesworth*  
Ayesha Sultana, *selected by Maria Lind*  
Anne Imhof, *selected by Laura McLean-Ferris*  
Ádám Kokesch, *selected by Dóra Maurer*  
Asim Waqif, *selected by Dieter Roelstraete*  
Rodrigo Hernández, *selected by Chris Sharp*  
Oscar Neuestern, *selected by Mario García Torres*  
Bùi Công Khanh, *selected by Zoe Butt*  
Rachelle Sawatsky, *selected by Andrew Berardini*  
Gian Maria Tosatti, *selected by Mike Watson*  
Delcy Morelos, *selected by Lucas Ospina*  
Senzeni Mthwakazi Marasela,  
*selected by Koyo Kouoh*

Ma Qiusha, *selected by Song Dong*  
Kathryn Elkin, *selected by Fatoş Üstek*  
Mia Feuer, *selected by Graham Harman*  
Cyrill Lachauer,  
*selected by Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung*  
Nikita Kadan, *by Oliver Basciano*  
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Ayrson Heráclito, *by Adriano Pedrosa*

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No Past, No Future  
*by J.J. Charlesworth*

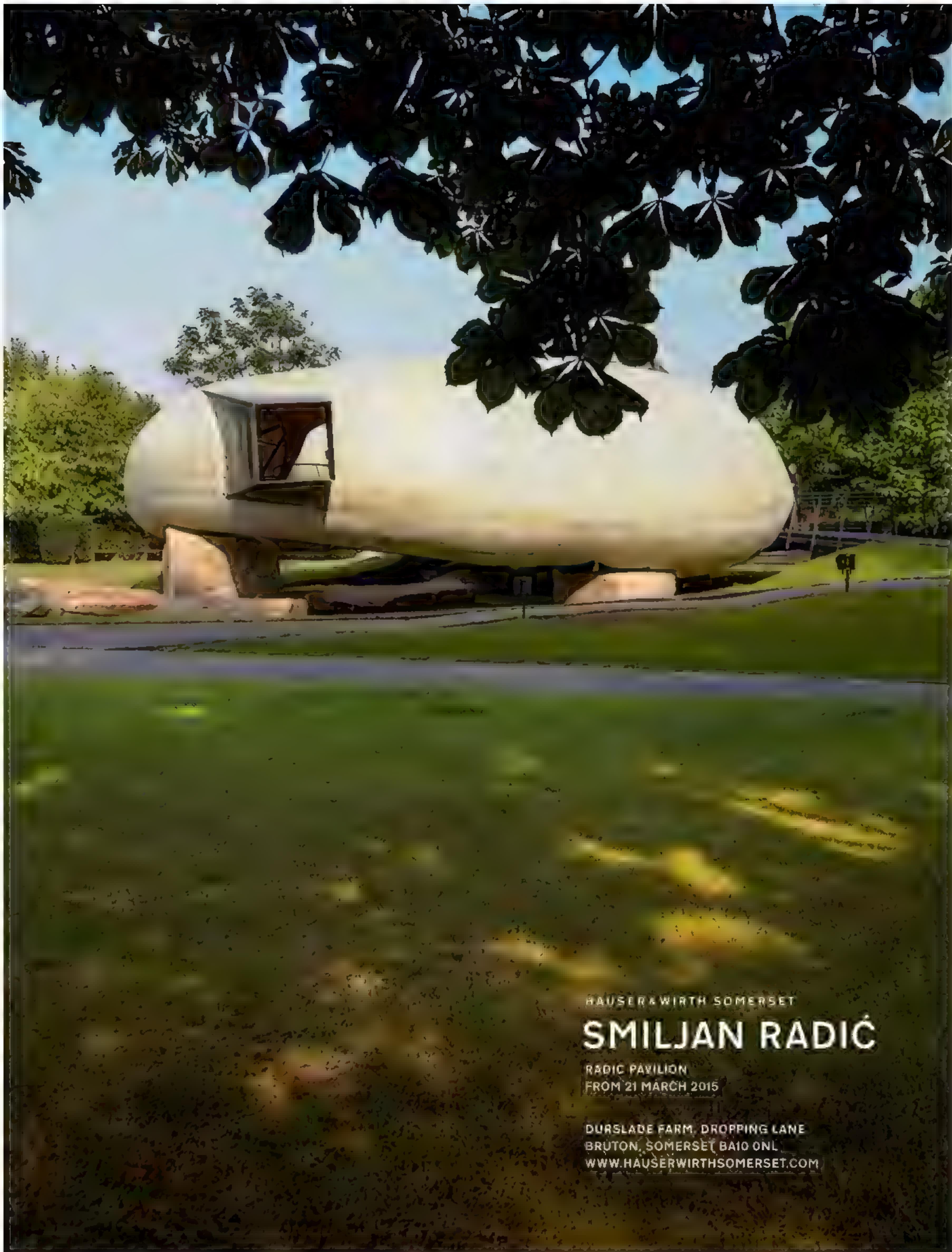
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Somewhere sideways,  
down, at an angle, but very close  
*by Florian Meisenberg*

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page 85 Ádám Kokesch, *Untitled 1*, 2010.  
Courtesy the artist



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Daniel Guzmán, by Dan Udy  
Dexter Dalwood, by Jennifer Thatcher  
Agnieszka Polska, by Helen Sumpter  
Robert Olsen, by Ed Schad  
Alma Allen, by Jonathan Griffin  
Diana Thater, by Jonathan T.D. Neil  
Rashaad Newsome, by David Everitt Howe  
Kara Walker, by Siona Wilson  
Robert Gober, by Joshua Mack  
Susan Philipsz, by Orit Gat  
Yael Bartana, by Brienne Walsh  
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Richard Hawkins, by Mark Prince  
Paolo Icaro, by Barbara Casavecchia  
Carla Arocha and Stéphane Schraenen, by Cathryn Drake  
*The Unwinding*, by Sam Steverlynck

*The Alien Within*, by Sara Arrhenius  
Alexander Gutke, by Jacquelyn Davis  
Aluminum Song, by Pavel S. Pyš  
*Anarchy. Utopia. Revolution.*, by John Quin  
Şahin Kaygun, by Sarah Jilani  
Niamh O'Malley, by Chris Fite-Wassilak  
Abraham Cruzvillegas, by Gabriela Jauregui  
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page 133 Robert Olsen, *Station*, 2009  
gesso on canvas over panel, 28 x 67 cm. Photo: Michael Underwood.  
Courtesy Luckman Fine Arts Complex at Cal State L.A., Los Angeles



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## Art Previewed

“A lot of people are going to hear of Miss Werner, soon,” said a voice with a broken accent. “That painting has got depth and a touch of humour, I like that...”

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# Previewed

*Bjork*  
MOMA, New York  
8 March – 7 June

*Les Oracles*  
xpo, Paris  
through 11 April

*Simon Ling*  
Bergen Kunsthall  
through 5 April

*Paul Johnson*  
Focal Point, Southend-on-Sea  
through 4 April

*Possibilities of the Object: Experiments  
in Modern and Contemporary Brazilian Art*  
Fruitmarket, Edinburgh  
13 March – 25 May

*Ydessa Hendeles*  
ICA, London  
25 March – 17 May

*Body Talk: Feminism, Sexuality and the Body  
in the Work of Six African Women Artists*  
Wiels, Brussels  
through 3 May

*Julia Dault*  
Marianne Boesky, New York  
20 February – 21 March

*Juliette Blightman*  
Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin  
through 4 April

*Pennacchio Argentato*  
T293, Naples  
(offsite project in Naples bank)  
through 13 April



3 Simon Ling, *Untitled*, 2014, oil on canvas, 130 x 100 cm.  
Photo: Marcus Leith. Courtesy Greengrassi, London

Even following recent institutional retrospectives for Kraftwerk and David Bowie, a MOMA survey<sup>1</sup> of Björk's last two decades may register as pushing it. Yet artist and venue effectively meet in the relativist middle, since neither are what they once were – the institution, like many others, now something of a populist funhouse; the Icelandic musician, her lauded new album aside, lately appearing increasingly interested in multimedia projects like 2011's record, app and invented-instruments live extravaganza *Biophilia*. Of course, Björk is a cross-media phenom in general, her videos trumping many artists' work for ideation, her acting winning prizes at Cannes, etc. Björk additionally promises the increasingly de rigueur upending of the survey format, embedding a semifictional biographical narrative (written with Icelandic

writer Sjón) and building to an 'immersive music and film experience' made with LA filmmaker/artist Andrew Thomas Huang and design team Autodesk.

Curated by Marisa Olson, the German-born, US-based artist/curator/writer who once auditioned for *American Idol* as an art project, wrote a dissertation live online, is widely credited with giving post-Internet art its name and cofounded the early 'surfing club' Nasty Nets, *Les Oracles* inhabits a different quadrant of the emphatically contemporary. Its ten women artists take science fiction as a vehicle for themes ('futurism, fantasy, utopia/dystopia, the frontier, embodiment, xenophobia, cosmology & theology, technological change, and evolution'), pulling these together under the sign of the oracle, the frequently female deity that forecasts the future. Smart

parallax should be in play – how much of this came true, and in what unexpected ways? – in the work, by artists including Julieta Aranda, Aleksandra Domanovic and Katja Novitskova. And because no show thus far in this column is complete without a fictional component, sci-fi by writer/musician Claire Evans will grace the catalogue.

<sup>3</sup> Simon Ling's exhibition at Bergen Kunsthall, *The Showing Uv It*, also sets itself against a sci-fi backdrop: Russell Hoban's exceptional 1980 novel *Riddley Walker*, set a couple of thousand years in the future in a postapocalyptic Kent where language has regressed (à la the exhibition title) and a new generation is struggling, in part, to understand objects and what can be intuited of their inner realities. This is surprisingly germane to the English painter's *plein-air*



1 Björk, *Volta*, 2007.

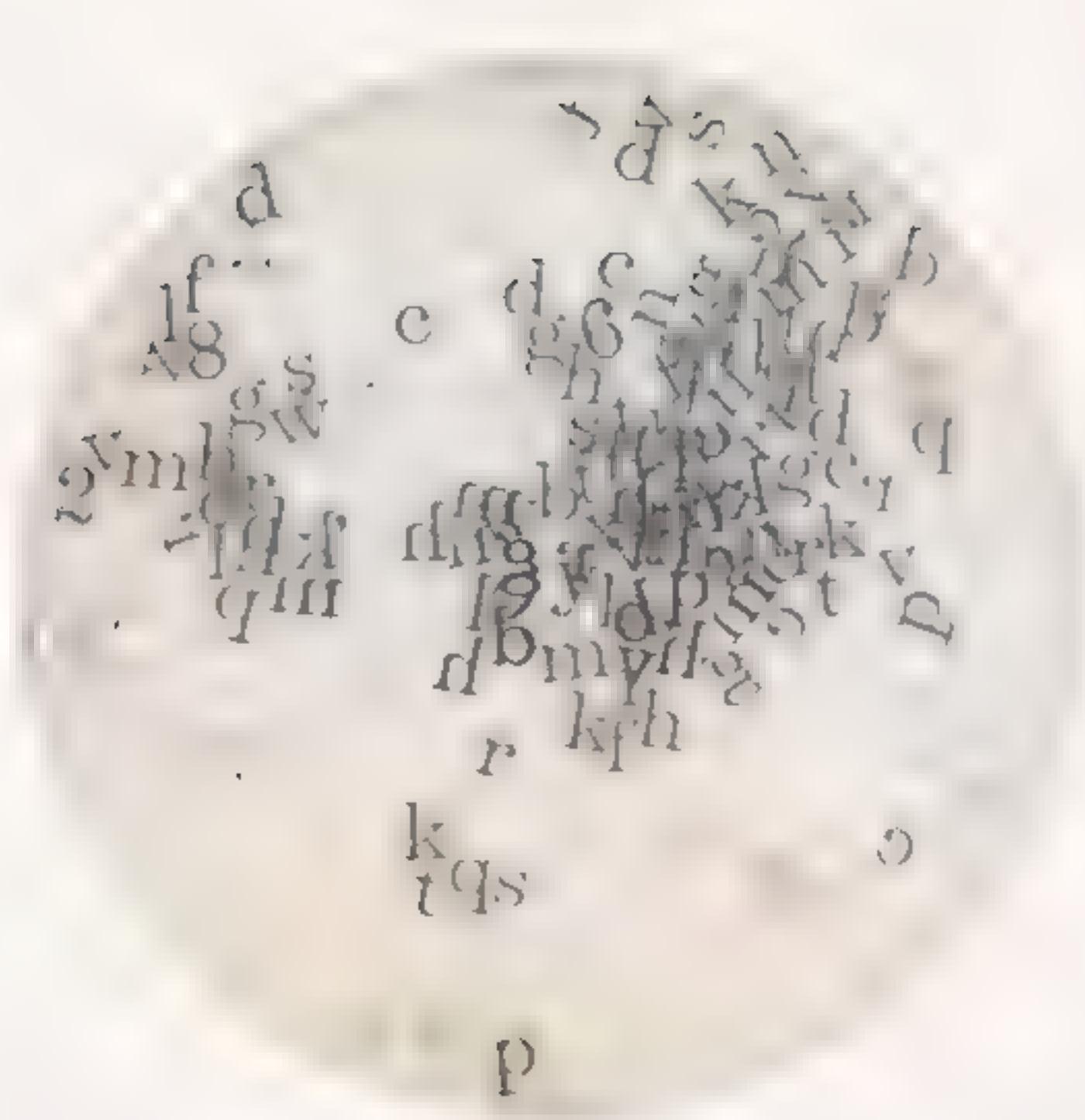
Photo: Nick Knight. Courtesy Wellhart Ltd & One Little Indian



2 Katja Novitskova, *Shapeshifter 1*, 2013, broken silicon wafers, epoxy clay, nail polish, appropriated acrylic case, appropriated wooden capital, 25 x 37 x 13 cm. Courtesy the artist



4 Paul Johnson, *Dune Buggy*, 2015,  
dune buggy vehicle, steel fixings. Photo: Manuela Barczewski.  
Courtesy the artist; Focal Point Gallery, Southend-on-Sea;  
and Ancient & Modern, London



5 Mira Schendel, *Untitled (Disks)*, 1972,  
transfer lettering and graphite on paper between acrylic sheets, 4 pins  
and nylon fishing wire, 27 x 27 x 1 cm. © Tate, London, 2014

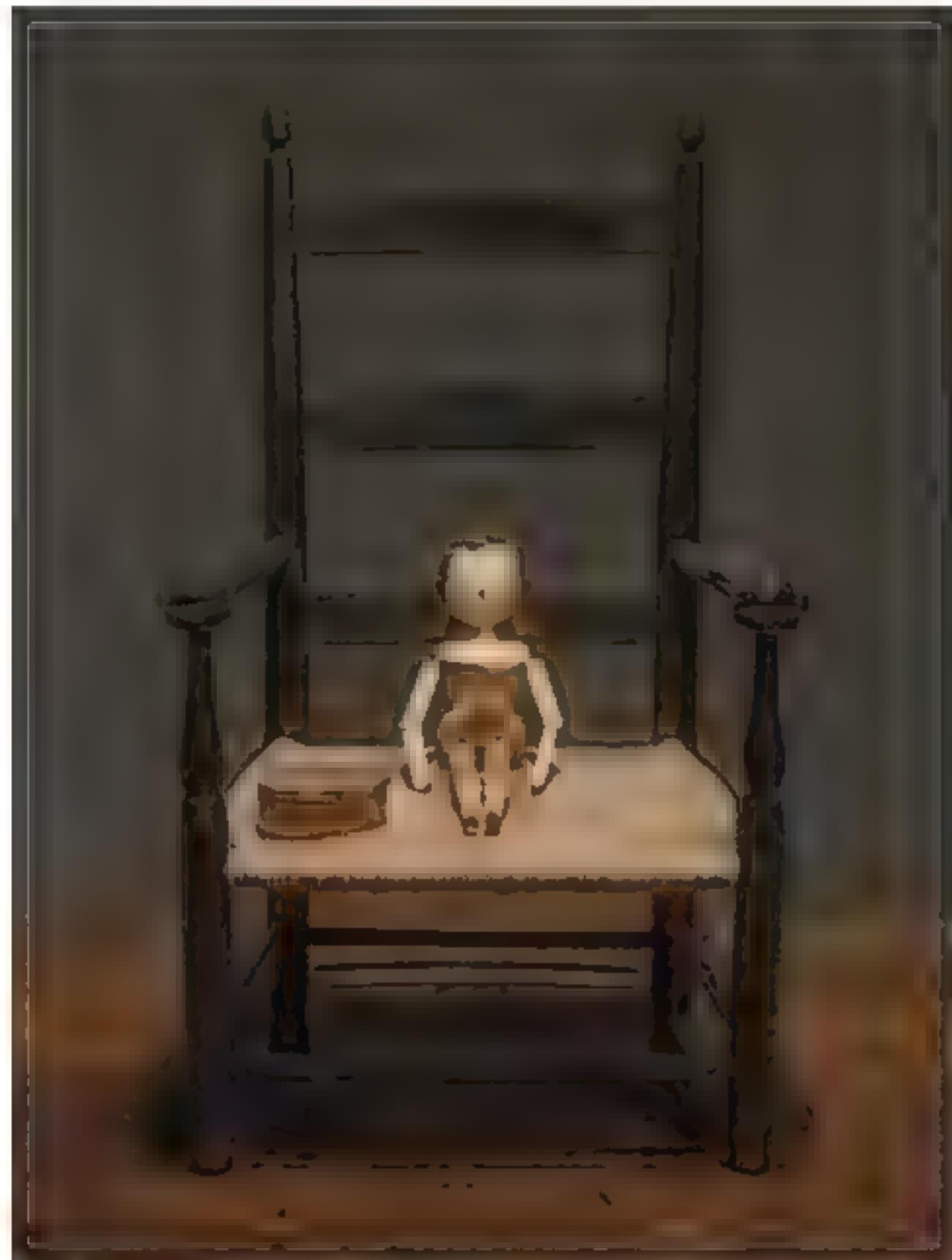
urban landscapes and studio-constructed still lifes, which intently track – and rebuild through tilted planes and subtle, pulsing distortion – the haphazard bricolage of London streets and tumbling arrangements of objects. If the looking couldn't feel closer, hot fringes of fluorescent orange amid the realist paint-handling suggests a transfigured world beneath the outward one, one we can't quite grasp; as Bergen Kunsthall curator Martin Clark has noted, Ling's method also has resonances with speculative realism, making him a rare painter broaching that philosophic territory.

At Focal Point, simultaneously, is a mise-en-scène that also feels emphatically *after* – Paul Johnson's *The Sunless Sea*, in which the British artist zooms into futurity in order to consider how we might see the present from then –

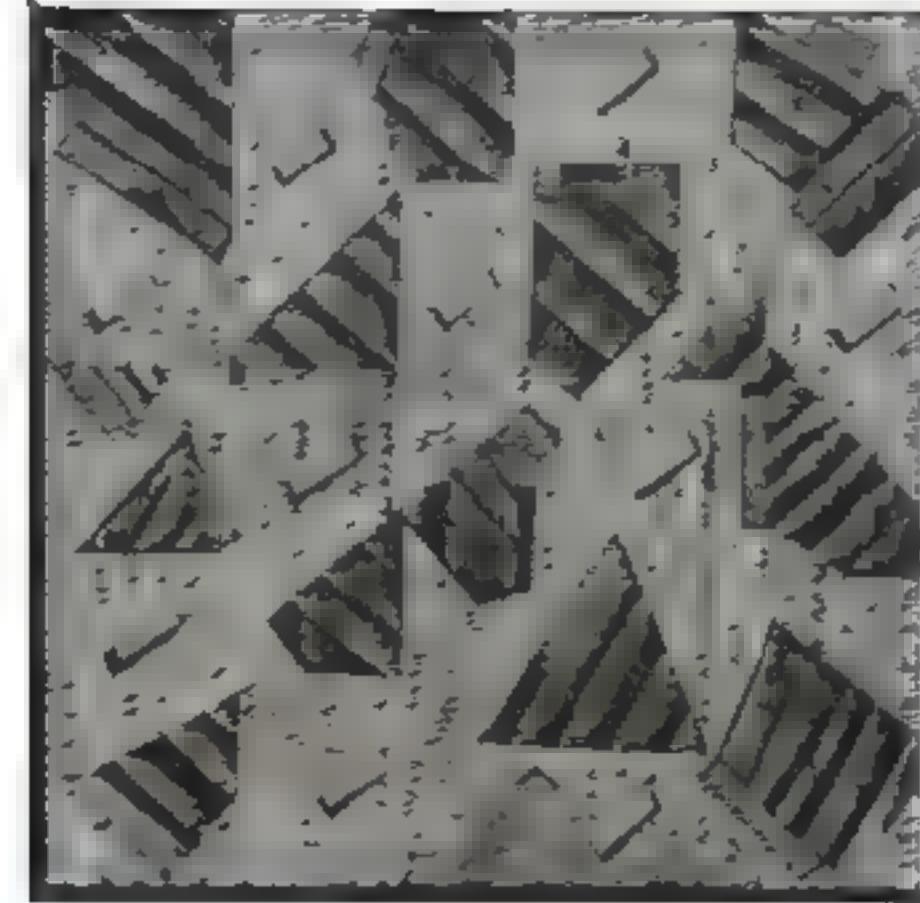
as a post-utopian scrapyard of sorts, it seems. Processes of time collaborate with the artist's hand: a dune buggy, made from recycled parts, stands upended and rusted, while 'sculpture' as a category also comes to encompass something – seemingly a wallet, though it no longer looks like one – that accreted for five years in one of Johnson's pockets. Meanwhile, a jerry-rigged mythology is suggested by mixing imagery from ancient Yemen with traces of beer crates and plastic bottles. If this sounds like a downer, though, the intent is to blow on embers: to quote the gallery concerning works made from leftover wood in the artist's studio, 'The sense of significance bestowed to the objects, which would more commonly be disregarded, offers optimism that these moments of utopia will be regarded in the future and

offer a glimmer of hope that such thinking could exist once more.'

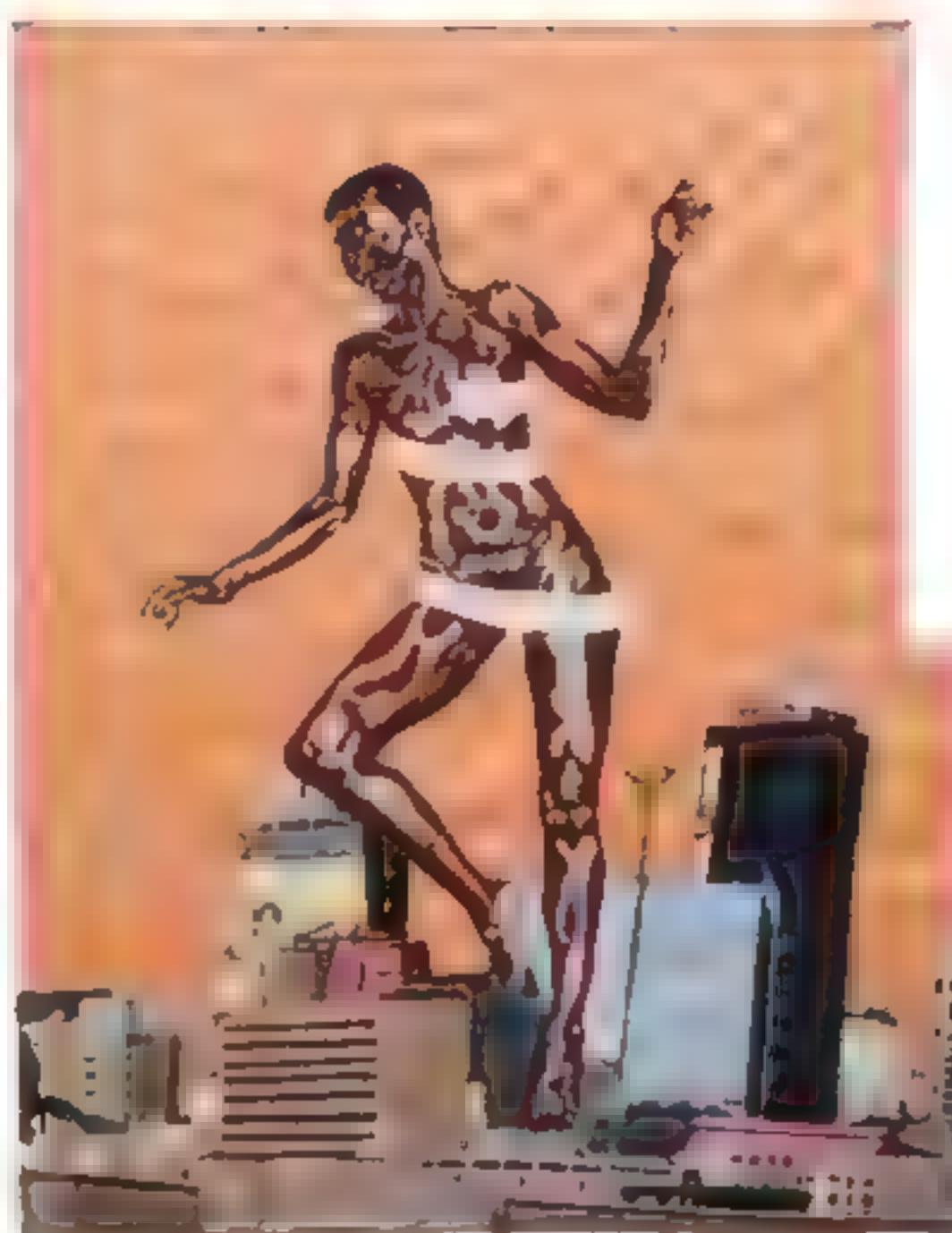
5 The artists in *Possibilities of the Object: Experiments in Modern and Contemporary Brazilian Art* mostly precede such post-utopian hang-ups. These objects from the last Brazilian half-century or so were intended to be figuratively graspable and actively transformative: often with the aim of reshaping society, as seen in the work of Cildo Meireles, Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark and Artur Barrio; sometimes for mystical-formalist reasons, as in the work of, say, Mira Schendel. Since the outset of Neo-Concretism, that aim has often been established by interaction, from Oiticica's work to the pendant, spice-filled biomorphic structures of Ernesto Neto, such that one legacy of Brazilian art since the 1950s is a decentring of the object –



6 Ydessa Hendeles, *From her wooden sleep...*, 2013 (detail).  
Photo: Robert Keziere. Courtesy the artist



8 Julia Dault, *K'Nex*, 2013-14, acrylic and oil on canvas in painted wood frame, 122 x 122 cm.  
Courtesy the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York



7 Billie Zangewa, *The Rebirth of the Black Venus*, 2010,  
silk tapestry, 127 x 130 cm. Private collection

it becomes not something to look at but something to travel through. How far that'll be reaffirmed or challenged by the curator, Rio art critic Paulo Venancio Filho, remains to be seen. But the show certainly features a scatter of lesser-known names amid the designated hitters, so expect an effervescent history lesson at least.

The ICA's theatre is to become a courtroom (though it might equally be an anatomy class or slave auction, according to advance information), courtesy of **Ydessa Hendeles**. For *From her wooden sleep...*, 150 wooden mannequins dating from 1520 to 1930 will gather around a central figure, in a freewheeling argument concerning the past's pressure on the present, the relativism of artefacts, the power relations between individual and group. Hendeles has form in this regard: formerly a sharp-eyed gallerist in Toronto, she's also a collector, curator and increasingly

something more – her show *Partners (The Teddy Bear Project)* (2002-3), for example, featured thousands of family photos linked by the presence of the eponymous toy, an archive via the incidental. If that was a curatorial project and, like her others, a well-received one, the self-described 'object-savant, and an exhibition-maker' is now, following shows at Andrea Rosen in New York and Johann König in Berlin, being branded as an artist-curator. See for yourself if the first half of the hyphenate feels true.

7 More bodies, unsurprisingly, in *Body Talk: Feminism, Sexuality and the Body in the Work of Six African Women Artists*. Possibly no need to explain what that's about, then. But it ought to be illuminating, the development of feminist African art since the 1990s perhaps not being hugely familiar to everyone. The best-known figure here, for most, will be the South African

Tracey Rose, longstanding maker of superbly confrontational, often performance-oriented videos and photos; others include Marcia Kure, whose watercolours and photographic works hybridise hip-hop style, Victoriana and male and female bodies, and Billie Zangewa's satire-driven tapestries, revolving around the position of women in urban and social landscapes.

Maker's Mark is a small-batch Kentucky bourbon, lately sold to a Japanese distillery. 8 It's also the title of Julia Dault's new show – fittingly, given the name, since her work concerns itself with the conditions of its own making. In the ascendant young Canadian artist's sculptures, bent or folded and shiny or iridescent materials are tenuously belted together, advertising the forces keeping them in precarious equipoise; in her paintings, often on synthetic supports (pleather, spandex), she

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Tony Montana



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Each of the works shown here will be included  
in the exhibition and is available for sale

paints only to later remove paint, bringing the offbeat ground back. The works take a circular approach to meaning that derives from Postminimalism self-reflexivity, but they also open onto questions of the value of artistic labour. Meanwhile, the pop-giddy, manmade surfaces Dault uses signal further ambivalence, being pleasing to the eye but also inhuman, figuring the maker's labouring hand as a hold-over in a postnature scenario.

9 Juliette Blightman practises discreet intransigence: I've seen a show of hers where a cine projector was turned on once a day, briefly, was silent otherwise, and when running showed not much. In a 2008 show, she exhibited an apple plus a goldfish in a bowl and a plant, which her brother came in to feed and water every day at 3pm. The presentation of liminal, unassuming moments is her forte; this, her work asserts,

can have a disproportionate recalcitrant force and weight. For her second show at Isabella Bortolozzi, the English artist is expanding into paintings that might, themselves, suggest film stills, as well as a film capturing interim moments in the artist's life before focusing in on books addressing, pointedly, the notion of selfhood and one's place in the world. Meanwhile – not clear how yet – the show will also continue in the basement, to a 4/4 rhythm.

10 In the past, artists Pennacchio Argentato have turned the threatening recorded speech – 'You will never be safe' – of one of the men who hacked British soldier Lee Rigby to death in Woolwich in 2013 into Perspex lettering and strafed it with fractal imagery, filtering it through technology so that it becomes gaudy, mediated, near-meaningless. They've also made body parts out of Kevlar and wavering,

ghostly transparent sculptures from the packaging material methacrylate; their work, they've said, emphasises 'the impact of technology and communication, and how these two forces reshape our identity and redefine our assumptions about the nature of ethics and political rights'. What emerges is tactical garbling and amputation of the visual and verbal. For their latest exhibition, expect figures cast from titanium standing in a row and wrinkled, solarised surfaces (of some sort) gracing the walls. This, the artists claim, all points towards a future scenario that asks, specifically, what constitutes the human in a technocratic world based purely on processes of exchange – hence the show being held not in Naples gallery T293, who organised it, but in a Neapolitan bank. Here, evidently, is where the unsafe and the bank safe coexist. Martin Herbert



9 Juliette Blightman, *Bolzano*, 2015, c-print.  
Courtesy the artist and Isabella Bortolozzi Galerie, Berlin



10 Pennacchio Argentato, *Alternate Future #771*, 2015,  
acrylic resin, paint and steel, 136 x 98 x 22 cm.  
Photo: Maurizio Esposito. Courtesy the artist and T293, Naples

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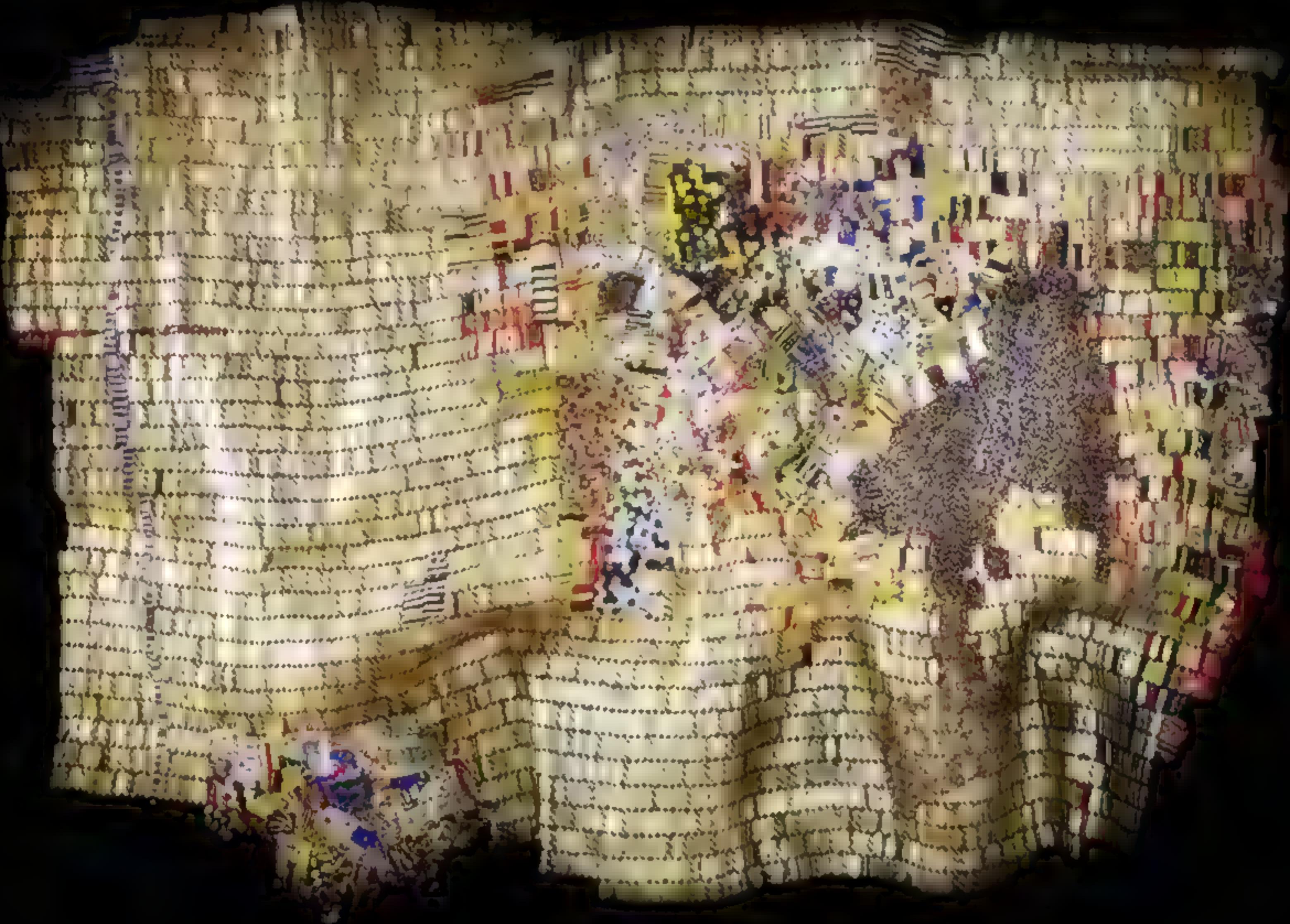
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3.12 - 4.9, 2015  
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# 6HP

Six Hearts Princess  
An Anime TV series to be aired in 2016

by Takashi Murakami  
Kaikai Kiki & STUDIO PONCOTAN & GENSHIMON

Illustration by JNTHED  
Cooperation by mebae & STUDIO PONCOTAN  
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In recent years, the story of Van Gogh's infamous self-mutilation and later suicide has been placed in doubt. Some German art historians have decided that the cut to the ear followed a quarrel with fellow artist Gauguin, who pulled a knife and injured the painter, and that in order to protect his irascible friend, Van Gogh concealed the incident. These experts base their argument on coded references they have found in the ample correspondence between Van Gogh and his brother, as well as on that traditional fallback of the penultimate generation of police procedurals: forensic evidence.

More recently still, other art historians, not satisfied with the ear, have gone for the big prize – Van Gogh's suicide, and tried to turn it into murder. According to this version, the painter fell victim to the bullying of a provincial chap with cosmopolitan airs who liked to carry a rifle and, in a countryside row with Van Gogh, killed the artist before fleeing the region. The same items – letters, records, rumours and forensic interpretation – back up the paradigm shift.

These theories have been challenged by others – among them those who wish to keep the faith and allow nothing to get in the way of their pilgrimage to the painter's mausoleum, the Van Gogh museum in Amsterdam, as well as by historians who like to eat historians for lunch, and make history for historians by refuting what the other historians say so as to go down in the history of history as historians. Such parties point out that the evidence for the above theories is inconclusive and have subsequently brought in their own forensic teams to bolster existing beliefs.

The Van Gogh legend, of course, has been around forever, and the bodies of evidence for the ear and the suicide are inconclusive. But more than being about the history of art, what all this shows is our appetite for stories. In a magazine like this one, bringing up Van Gogh may seem anachronistic, too premodern or modern for the sophisticated world of contemporary art, but the strange thing is that, despite the century that separates us from the Dutchman, the role of storytelling continues to dominate attempts to understand what happens in a work of art and in the production of an artist.

This is true in the business world too: as corporate logos become more abstract, flat

**THE STORY OF ART  
(No – not that one!)**  
**In this one, characters  
commit SUICIDE and are  
also victims of MURDER,  
historians are CANNIBALS,  
there are invocations of  
the Gospel of the Brands  
(and ST STEVE)**  
**and the eternal suffering  
of Third World art**

**THE PLACE WHERE  
EVERYTHING GETS LOST  
DOWN THE CRACKS**

by  
**Lucas Ospina,  
(Third World) artist**



*Lust for Life*, 1956, dir Vincente Minnelli.  
Courtesy MGM

and simplistic, greater emphasis is placed on CEOs and the stories they themselves must convey (Jobs was to Apple as Branson is to Virgin and Zuckerberg to Facebook). So just as the limited gospel of some brands is incarnated in a person (compensating for the impassivity of its graphic design with the emotiveness of its leaders), in the artworld the success of many careers seems to be determined by artists' knack for storytelling, and by the hair-splitting narratives of their public-relations people (which include journalists, gallerists, curators and historians).

For example, an impressive crack, created in the floor of a hall in an important gallery (Tate), is given a coded name (*Shibboleth*, 2007), a word with mystic overtones; then a text is added that speaks of divisions between the rich and the poor, the welcomed and the excluded. Now, rather than being seen for its tremendous power as sculpture, as the opening to a sign that something can exist without the chimera of language, the composition becomes a symbol that is meticulously tended to by the bureaucrats of repetition, who make it their responsibility to spread the word, transporting the Third World artist (Doris Salcedo), this eternal sufferer, to the altar of art, and into the canon.

No mention is made, of course, of the fact that the company (Unilever) that's sponsoring the exhibition is globally known for contributing to the very social fracturing the artist denounces. No, with storytelling there is no need to depart from the script: stories produce experiences, stories reveal what makes your message unique, stories are the emotional glue that connects you with your customers, stories shape information into meaning, stories motivate an audience towards your goal, stories are more likely to be shared, stories are less likely to be resisted. This is almost invariably the mantra when writing about a work or an artist, always positive, always hagiographic (the curatorial text must not criticise).

The difference from Van Gogh's case is that now the storytelling comes before, follows and overtakes the very fact of the exhibited work. Instead of producing an initial uproar that brings on the possibility of silence, artists and their scribes fill the space around the works with rambling, self-satisfied noise whose only goal is to sell.

*Translated from the Spanish by David Terrien*

First I saw the Giant Water Lily, *Victoria amazonica*, bloom: its spiky bud slowly breaking open so that long white petals could fall out like the tongues of prehistoric animals, as all the while the sweet smell of pineapple spread across the room. Then it was the *Jan Lindblad Film Festival* (2010), featuring immensely popular nature programmes made during the 1960s and 70s by Sweden's answer to David Attenborough, who, unlike the Englishman, took his engagement with his subjects so far as to include wrestling with both tigers and anacondas. And then recently, when I saw documentation, by the same artist, of a giant (human-size) otter giving birth to three pups, my suspicion was confirmed: this was someone who is onto something special, and despite its naive appearance, her work has to be taken seriously.

Ingela Ihrman works within the horizon of the 'wonders of nature'. Through her performances, rare plants from faraway places are brought to life, blooming in front of people's eyes in greenhouses as well as exhibition spaces. There is the blooming of the snakelike cactus Queen of the Night, *Selenicereus grandiflorus*, which emits its vanilla fragrance at night, and another one with the dark red Giant Corpse Flower, *Amorphophallus titanum*, which comes with the smell of decomposing flesh. As the Latin name indicates, it does indeed look like a deformed phallus. Sometimes a botanist or gardener commentates on the performance, as they might have in the nineteenth century, when bloomings of this kind attracted large audiences – and as did the nature programmes broadcast on tv during the artist's childhood.

Why is a young and apparently immensely thoughtful and talented person fabricating such odd, elaborate outfits, and then donning them in public (maybe in private too, who knows)? It is childish, playful, touching, imaginative and disturbing at the same time. It is possibly as far from cool – according to the measure of current barometers – as it gets, and very time-consuming as well. Ihrman's works deal with mundane small-town pastimes and a deep-seated longing for faraway places. She works in a cultural context where the great outdoors is used for Sunday excursions and exercise, where it is enjoyed remotely on screens and studied

## The TRANSFORMING WONDERS of the NATURAL WORLD

or

### How a PREHISTORIC ANIMAL that looks like a cross between a reptile and a character from *The Muppet Show* was sent to battle twisted ideas of STABILITY and HOMOGENEITY in SOUTH SWEDEN

#### ALSO COVERED: Sweden's answer to David Attenborough, a Giant Corpse Flower, a human-size otter and the art of Ingela Ihrman

by

*Maria Lind, curator, Stockholm*



Ingela Ihrman, *The Giant Water Lily Victoria amazonica BLOOMS*, 2012, public blooming.  
Courtesy Kalmar Konstmuseum, Sweden

in lexica, but where it also becomes a surface for emotional projection. She harnesses the great outdoors so that it might creep into other forms of existence, offering unlikely ways by which to transcend all kinds of limitations. And yet her work is not merely escapist.

On the animal side of Ihrman's work there is the giant toad, which is struggling silently (and with great effort) to get through an obstacle race in a sports hall. The Russian Cave Goat is a rugged creature from the shores of the river Volga: in Ihrman's reincarnation it is back in a real cave, bleating gently among a crowd of spectators. An early video features a human-size blackbird sitting on the roof of a house, singing its hopeful song of spring. There is also a video – particularly peculiar – showing what Jan Lindblad would have seen had he been inside the anaconda rather than outside it.

In times of outsourcing and in which consumer relations override most other forms of human exchange, Ihrman's return to hobbyism and craft, amateur theatre traditions and poetic absurdism is refreshing. It certainly does not resemble anything else I have seen, and it makes me happy to know that this kind of 'other world' is even possible. When I try the modus of identification, of all her many creatures, I end up wanting to be the Stegocephalia from Bjuv – albeit temporarily. This prehistoric animal looks like a cross between a reptile and a character from *The Muppet Show*. More precisely it is a wearable reconstruction of an extinct amphibian named after the town in south Sweden where its fossil was found in a coalmine.

During the heyday of the Stegocephalia, this area was a shallow sea close to the equator. Such transformations of both the landscape and the climate are good reminders of the inescapable condition of change. Especially in this case, as 15 percent of the population in today's Bjuv support the anti-immigrant, populist rightwing party Sweden Democrats, which champions nationalism and a chauvinistic cultural heritage based on twisted ideas of stability and homogeneity. It's fitting then that in 2013 the artist donated the costume of the Stegocephalia from Bjuv to the local municipality for its citizens to wear at their discretion.

A doorframe hangs from the ceiling in a dilapidated room. Its wooden jambs dangle like the swinging legs of a suicide victim. The scene is awkward and not a little depressing. It has the same feeling of domesticity-gone-wrong as does a crime scene. Except here it's the house itself that seems to have ended it all.

It's part of the first show by my former colleague Sean Griffiths (*My Dreams of Levitation*, 2014, Room Artspace, London), with whom I share a long history as a codirector of the architecture (and other things) office FAT. During the 20-odd years of FAT's practice, the studio shifted from its origins – typical mid-1990s mode – as a cross-disciplinary practice thriving on the hazy boundary between art and architecture, to something approaching the architectural mainstream. We closed the office last year, going out on a high by curating the British Pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale and designing a house with Grayson Perry.

It turned out that our original hunch about an art/architecture practice was both exactly right and totally wrong. Right in the sense that architecture, design and fine art have, in certain circumstances, merged. This has brought together alliances of artists, architects, engineers and mayors to produce a new kind of practice: the kind that creates huge, spectacular things performing at an urban scale. Things like Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate* (2006) in Chicago's Millennium Park or London's proposed Garden Bridge by Heatherwick Studio. Along with this we could bag up the headline-stealing architecture that comes out of studios such as those fronted by Zaha Hadid and Frank Gehry. These are projects that are about cities jostling for pole position. We could think of them as a hollowed-out form of practice that has jettisoned any claims to wider disciplinary concerns in the pursuit of global spectacle.

## THE END OF ARCHITECTURE

The Venice Architecture Biennale, Grayson Perry and a doorframe hanging from a ceiling provoke FANTASIES about the LONG, SLOW SUICIDE of his profession and cause *Sam Jacob*, an architect (for now), to wonder whether or not the best works of real architecture are in fact works of art

Sean Griffiths, *My Dreams of Levitation*, 2014 (installation view, Room Artspace, London). Courtesy the artist



But while this 'exceptional' kind of project has emerged, the rest of the architectural world 'got small', as Norma Desmond might have said. That's to say, architecture's risk aversion became so endemic that it's little wonder so much new building is anaemic and repetitive to the point

that an architecture office is the worst place to be if you want to think about architecture.

This extreme separation between glittering spectacle and grinding mediocrity leaves the real job – of giving places identity, of creating fulfilling social scenarios, of making engaged and meaningful urban propositions – sadly void.

The main part of Griffiths's installation is a three-dimensional offset of a room constructed within the very

same room. The usual trimmings of skirting board, window frame and cornice have been cut loose from the walls they normally anchor and instead float within the space. These traditional strips of domesticated timber have been assembled like a glitchy wireframe-model forming a spatial double-exposure of the room. The doorways become congested by multiple doorframes that pass through their openings, windows become obscured by other versions of themselves suspended in front. Through its jogged offset, the space of the room that normally remains as background to the life that happens within it is made visible and legible. It makes for a very *unheimlich* kind of semidetaching, where ordinary domestic space is haunted by a ghost of itself.

So is Griffiths's installation an architectural suicide note? Is he pronouncing architecture's corpse dead on arrival?

There are many references here. There are shades of Gordon Matta-Clark's architectural interventions, of Dan Graham's weird internalised complexities of space. There are moments of architecture too: of Frank Gehry's early sawn-and-nailgunned Home Depot experiments, of Peter Eisenman's indexical method and of Venturi and Scott Brown's Franklin Court 'ghost house'.

Maybe death isn't a bad thing. In dying, could architecture be reincarnated as art? Could the architect reborn as an artist imagine a new kind of practice? Maybe, Griffiths is saying, it's easier to make architecture by approaching it through fine art. Maybe, freed from the yoke of professionalism, something more architectural can emerge. Maybe you have to kill what you love.

This is art about the idea of architecture, and within it are suggestions of how becoming an ex-architect might be a way of defining a new role in the making of space and cities, and how deprofessionalisation might be a way for architecture to get its real mojo back.

Can the science of 'happiness' tell us something about the value of art? Economists have long concerned themselves with 'utility', which translates roughly to satisfaction, though without the psychological messiness that being 'satisfied' or not implies. But beginning in the 1990s, at the moment when contemporary art was becoming self-conscious about its own contemporaneity, some social scientists, psychologist Daniel Kahneman most prominently, began to take seriously the utility of utility – that is, our self-consciousness of those satisfactions, something that demand curves (that measure the price against the availability of a product) just weren't capturing. 'Subjective wellbeing' became an area of study in itself, and facets of subjective wellbeing began to emerge, notably 'experienced wellbeing', which concerns itself with moment-to-moment assessments of pleasure, joy, suffering or pain – in other words, what experiences feel like at the time – in contrast to 'evaluative wellbeing', which assesses overall life satisfaction – what those experiences feel like over time.

Another facet, and the one that is most intriguing when it comes to thinking about the value of art, is 'eudaimonic wellbeing', which assesses the meaningfulness or sense of purpose that one finds in life and so assigns to certain activities and not others. Here the difference comes down to what is experienced as 'rewarding' rather than

'pleasurable', and a standard example holds that whereas spending time with one's children is more rewarding than pleasurable; binge-watching, say, *Breaking Bad* is more pleasurable than rewarding. Eudaimonic wellbeing has long been a core concept for the cultural policy set, where the 'arts' in general are a lever for a flourishing citizenry that thinks about the social whole rather than its own immediate gratifications, but rarely has this eudaimonic dimension been applied to our experience of individual works of art, at least in those terms.

In that realm, we have the habit of thinking about such satisfactions mostly on a spectrum that runs from something like aesthetic 'pleasure' to antiaesthetic 'criticality'. In today's marketplace, there can be little argument that the

## OLD-FASHIONED VALUES! such as OPTIMISM? MEANING? PURPOSE? SELF-WORTH?

THOSE are some  
of the terms that we no  
longer associate with  
CONTEMPORARY ART,  
but should we?

And if we did, how would  
we measure them anyway?

Bah –  
someone  
pass us  
the latest  
Christie's  
or Sotheby's  
results...

*Jonathan  
T.D. Neil,  
a 'dreamer',  
suggests we*

*look for values in art beyond  
those 'dictated' by the market*



Josh Smith, *Untitled*, 2013, oil on panel, 152 x 122 cm.

Photo: Jonathan Muzikar. © the artist.

Included in the exhibition *The Forever Now*, 2014.

Courtesy Museum of Modern Art, New York

aesthetic pole reigns supreme. Jeff Koons's balloon-dog dominance on the auction block, MOMA's enshrinement of the market darlings of contemporary painting in its *Forever Now* exhibition, the rise of Instagram as market agency, all attest to the 'I-like-it' level of acuity for which even the most active participants in the artworld are willing to settle in their engagement with works of art. Which is not to say that the antiaesthetic has disappeared. The critical 'challenge' of art, its perceived 'difficulty' and sometimes self-conscious esotericism, is just as 'likeable' today – think Paul Chan or Pierre Huyghe – especially for those who wish to distinguish themselves from art's more market-friendly fanboys. The ideal is a mixture, equal parts critical and commercial success, as the movie business well knows.

'Criticality', though, was never a substitute for purpose. While antiaesthetic criticality appeared to counter the immediacies of aesthetic pleasure, which it charged with market-friendliness and cultural affirmation – call it decoration for iniquities – it failed to yield any direction or commitments of its own. It remained 'on the spectrum', so to speak, where the experience it afforded could be assessed still in terms of the pleasures it provided.

The categories of subjective experience that matter to eudaimonic wellbeing, on the other hand, remain at a remove here. In front of what work of art today can we claim – or would we even want to claim – feelings of optimism, of meaning and purpose, of autonomy and self-worth? It's not an easy question to answer, not least because these states of being are at once highly subjective and fundamentally social. Even the National Academy of Science's report on *Subjective Well Being: Measuring Happiness, Suffering, and Other Dimensions of Experience* (2013) acknowledges the difficulty that comes with trying to capture – that is, to measure – anyone's sense of purpose in what they do or experience, which is why it is the least studied when compared to experienced and evaluative wellbeing.

The key to eudaimonic wellbeing, to the sense of purpose that defines it, is some sense of a shared social future. Experienced and evaluative wellbeing concern themselves with the present and the retrospective, the temporal lynchpins for thinking the contemporary. Only eudaimonic wellbeing gains its power from one's commitment to a future, and notably – contrary to the Ayn Randian idiocies that hold sway with much of the monied elite – one that contains more than just oneself and one's family. An art that commits to a grand vision of that future, and which demonstrates how others can commit to it as well, and for their own wellbeing, would be an art of purpose, not pleasure.



LONDON | UK Premiere | Ciné Lumière | 9.3.2015

NAPLES | MADRE Museo d'arte contemporanea Donnaregina | 11.3.2015

DUBAI | Art Dubai | 18 – 21.3.2015

ROME | MAXXI Museo nazionale delle Arti del XXI secolo | 24.4.2015

GENEVE | CAC Centre d'Art Contemporain | Cinéma Dynamo | 30.4.2015

**THE LACK**  
A FILM BY  
**MASBEDO**

For the past 50-odd years, Cuba has steadily entrenched its image as an isolated, and consequently somewhat anachronistic, island. Recently, however, both via its own initiative and certainly pushed to the fore by US president Barack Obama's announcement of a thaw in the trade embargo between the two countries, this has begun to change. The result is that international business is anticipating opportunities in a hitherto underexploited ecotope, and the international artworld now speculates on how this will affect Cuban art, its makers and its markets.

The island's unique position in global politics has been the subject of many works by both exiled and local artists. Among those works are Wifredo Lam's classic *El Tercer Mundo* (*The Third World*, 1965–6), a painting of a cosmos of interconnected human, faunal and vegetal formations that was originally conceived for the presidential palace and is today on display in Cuba's Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. Critics like Havana-based Gerardo Mosquera have contextualised Lam's work within the anticolonial struggles of Cuba. Lam also contributed to visualising the hybrid identity of 'La Isla' and the transformations that led to its ideological isolation and – analogous to the consequences of the Galápagos Islands' geographical remoteness – to a new collective consciousness evolving from the disconnected local conditions.

When I visited Cuba last December, I experienced isolation mainly in the form of limited Internet access – only 3.4 percent of households are connected. The enforced break from emailing and Googling didn't so much feel like travelling back in time as like being in a place where past and present moments were amalgamated: for example, the taxi driver picking me up from the airport wore an Ed Hardy t-shirt and talked into his Internetless smartphone while driving a blue 1954 Pontiac. And when it comes to art, new initiatives such as the art space Fábrica de Arte Cubano ('Factory of Cuban Art') or a gallery and coffeehouse bearing the Magrittean title *Esto no es un café* ('This is not a café') and operated by curator Mayrelis Peraza, alongside internationally exhibiting Cuban artists or artists with Cuban heritage such as Coco Fusco, Wilfredo Prieto and Los Carpinteros, testify to gradual change.

Only two weeks after Obama's announcement, another headline moved the (art) world's eyes to Cuba. On 30 December 2014, artist Tania Bruguera was arrested to prevent her staging the performance *Tatlin's Whisper #6* at the Plaza de la Revolución. The work invites people to step onto a podium and share their opinions for one minute via microphone. In 2009 the piece had

## THE FREEZE AND THE THAW

As CUBA starts to restore its international relations  
a CURATOR visits  
the Caribbean island  
to investigate what that  
means for art

Of course,  
it means trouble if you're  
TANIA BRUGUERA  
but ED HARDY seems  
to be doing fine

And that's not all that's  
going on  
by  
Stefanie Hessler (*the curator*)

been exhibited without interference during the tenth edition of the Bienal de La Habana, organised by the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam. The press release for the event, with the hashtag #YoTambienExijo ('I Also Demand'), read: 'The aim... is that Cubans peacefully express what ideas they have about their nation and its future, after the re-establishment of relations between Cuba and the United States.' While Bruguera stated she thought the government was ready for differences in opinion, this clearly proved not to be the case. She and her collaborators were arrested before they could get to the announced location, and the artist was detained on two further occasions afterwards: when she tried to organise a press conference on Havana's harbour promenade, Malecón; and when she demanded the release of people planning to participate in the performance who were still being held at the prisoner processing centre. An open letter to the Castro government by artworld figures followed, together with articles on how official Cuban press and some art outlets have misreported the event. Bruguera's passport was subsequently confiscated, and as of early February she was being told she would need to remain in Cuba for an additional 60 days while prosecutors decide whether or not to press charges.

It will be interesting to see how artists invited to this year's biennial will respond to the recent impediments to freedom of speech. Somewhat ironically, the incidents moved art from an isolated position with 'the explosive force of a very large banana-cream pie' (as Kurt Vonnegut, Jr, once described the impact of all art and literature opposed to the Vietnam War), to that of something that might have a very real political effect. Even if Bruguera's performance became a work that was something other than

had been intended, the fact that any kind of artwork was deemed to have enough impact to merit its censorship can be seen (with a big dose of irony) as something positive. And while it remains to be seen how Cuba will change if the US Congress agrees to go ahead with the thaw in relations between the two countries, one hopes

on a more general level that the view that art has some sort of importance besides any projected economic value (the usual reason an artwork makes the news) is one that will persist.



Journalists wait for Tania Bruguera at Plaza de la Revolución in Havana, 30 December 2014.  
Photo: Adalberto Roque/Getty Images



1st Anniversary of  
LONG MUSEUM WEST BUND  
庆祝龙美术馆（西岸馆）开馆壹周年

# Xu Zhen Solo Exhibition



The spotless gallery wall, though a fragile evolutionary product of a highly specialized nature, is impure. It subsumes commerce and esthetics, artist and audience, ethics and expediency. It is in the image of the society that supports it, so it is a perfect surface off which to bounce our paranoias. That temptation should be resisted.

Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 1976

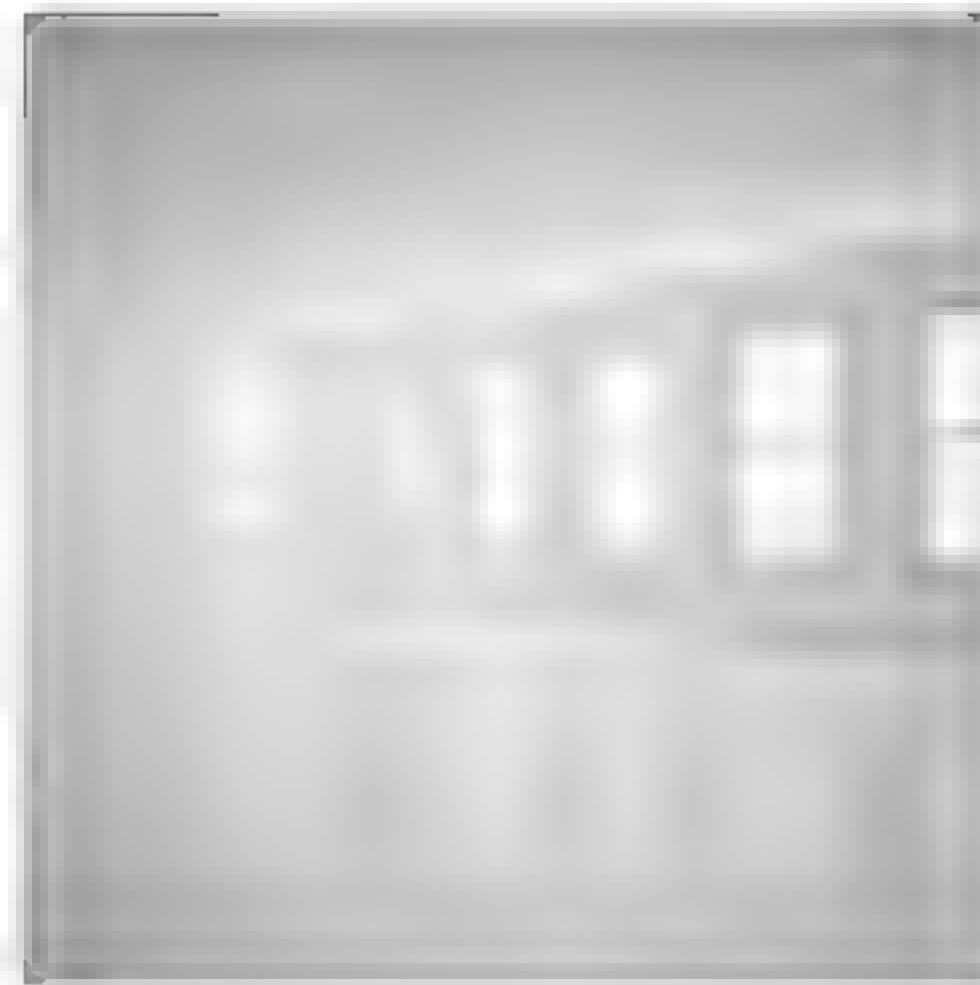
Above waxed wood slats or polished concrete and below the nesting insects of lighting apparatus – both fluorescents and cans – the four blank-faced walls of the white cube stare back at us. Spotless but impure, silently telling us what we really think about art, inviting more than a few temptations both to empty paranoias and perhaps some fulsome truths.

Any paint-store dawdler has read seemingly endless lists of the variety of whites available by the gallon for blanking out a room. Eggshell and cream, ivory and alabaster, pearl and porcelain, milk and snow, linen and cotton, pure and papery, and that most nefarious shade of corporate capitalism: beige, like the pastiest skin of its lowliest office drone. (The racial twinge of all this white is not lost on us.) Exactly which shade of white probably doesn't really matter; it can be easily adjusted on your laptop anyway, before jettisoning the files to promoters and clients.

This perfect vitrine, a triumph of international style, the illusion of an empty slate, a room seamlessly to pedestal, frame and sell art – or at least the idea of it – always cleanly delimited by those blank, ubiquitous walls, the white cube is not meant to be seen but to disappear in the diaphanous penumbra of the product on display. But it was seen. Artists and writers attempted to deal with it: O'Doherty led the charge.

Getting outside that white cube turned out to be just a hopeful feint in the end. Art in the 'expanded field' often ended up complementing those indoor powers: highbrow touristic retreats to 'authentic' landscapes in flyover country, galleried exhibitions on work never intended to be domesticated by museums, supersize objects only prompting the construction of even bigger white cubes to contain them. The field expanded and capitalism expanded to contain it, removing its dangers and ensuring its presentation in the showroom.

Almost 40 years after O'Doherty's wickedly smart and



often funny little book on the white cube, the only thing that's changed is the size of the room and the extent of its international conquest. Those that escape are still escaping it, but even rejected, we accept the white cube as a standard like we accept the shape and size of a sheet of printer paper.

Just where has this whiteness gotten us?

Such a pristine little prison we've found ourselves in. The Futurists wanted to tear down the museums because they no longer served the living. I no longer know how the Museum of Modern Art serves me, controlled by people who own all things taunting me with treasures I could never hope to touch for the cost of a ticket I can barely afford. All of it whitened and cubed. As O'Doherty pointed out, the white cube was and still is a reflection of power, and power right now sucks. It's stern and white and able to make money off just about anything you want to put into it.

It's possible to rid ourselves of this modernist hangover, these crystalline temples and bloodless boutiques in the service of economics. This is not worth 'interrogating' any more: the room is silent, the power resolute, the cheque cashed and the whiteout complete.

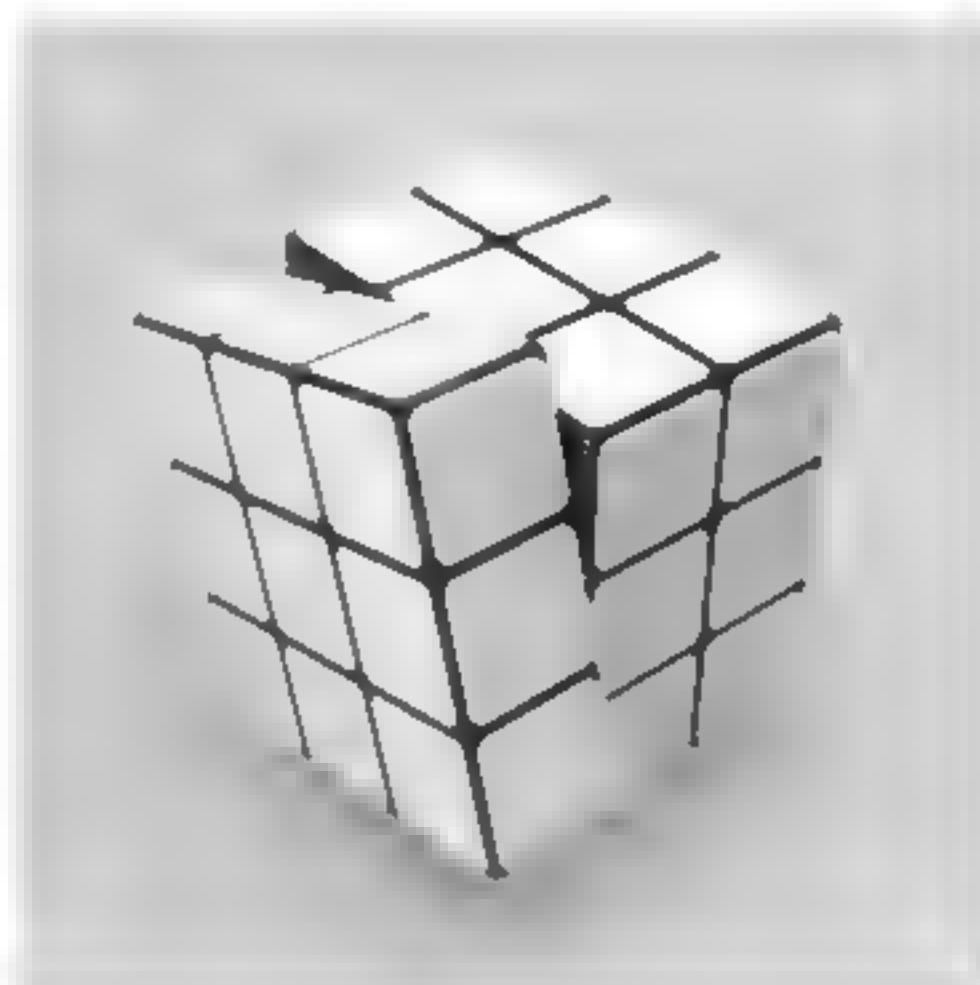
Surely we can do better.

Paint the walls baby-blue or hot pink, chartreuse or ochre, rust-red or ash-grey. Make art galleries like libraries filled with comfortable places to sit and curators like librarians on hand to answer questions. Make art that can be touched by anybody, not just its owner. Make space that's human-scaled and intimate. Remove the separation between art and life. Let the space of art be open, porous, inclusive. Stain the white cube's pseudo-purity with the messiness of our bodies, greasy fingers and colourful effluents. Do it so much that whiteness and cubeness disappear, and whatever's left over just might have some potential.

I don't really know how to deal with the white cube's spooky power. This might just be another plaintive cry against that unbroken and unbreakable colour. But I do know all this whiteness is making me snowblind.

Give me shadowy dens of iniquity with art like an opium pipe. Give me green summer fields with art like a dance, undocumented and immediate, impossible to contain. Give me soft sanctuaries with art like a cool caress across a fevered brow.

Give me relief from all this white.



Too-white cubes



**GUSTAVO SPERIDIÃO**

**MAY 20 - JULY 4**

**anita schwartz**

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Hot with anticipation, I awaited the arrival of my new 'life model', my mind reeling with the boundless potential of it all. Goosebumps arranged themselves on my arms and legs as I dared to hope.

Would inspiration wrap my diminutive frame in its warm embrace this time? Or would it be like all those other times. A dull, plodding session. A lumbering death march of vagina painting.

Don't say it! Let not those cold words escape your lips! This time will be amazing! This girl's vagina will spark the fires of creativity and her inner beauty will gush onto my canvas... and not in the bad way.

After what seemed like an eternity Kristina with a K finally arrived! She was a pretty girl with auburn hair and quizzical eyes. All business and in no need of direction. She stripped, threw herself into the chair I'd set up and pulled her knees up towards her shoulders in the manner that is the style among the millennial set. She had a delightful vagina. This can't be overstated! It was well proportioned and not too aggressive. But as I worked, something odd began to happen. After I had figured out the basic composition, I couldn't shake the feeling I was being watched. A chill ran up my spine as I looked up from her gorgeous twat to find her eyes intently fixed on me. I looked down. Certainly this was nothing strange, but a few moments later I looked up again and there was no mistaking it. She was staring at me. Unnerved by what can only be described as an 'empathic connection', I confronted the situation head-on.

"Excuse me, is there something wrong?" I asked.

"What? No. Why do you ask?" She tilted her head like it was the oddest thing in the world.

Why do I ask? Why do I ask?

"Well... I just feel like you're staring at me... and it's... um..."

"Oh... yeah, I'm just studying you... for a project."

"A project?"

"Yeah... I'm doing research... you know... for an art project..."

"Oh..."

"Does that bother you?"

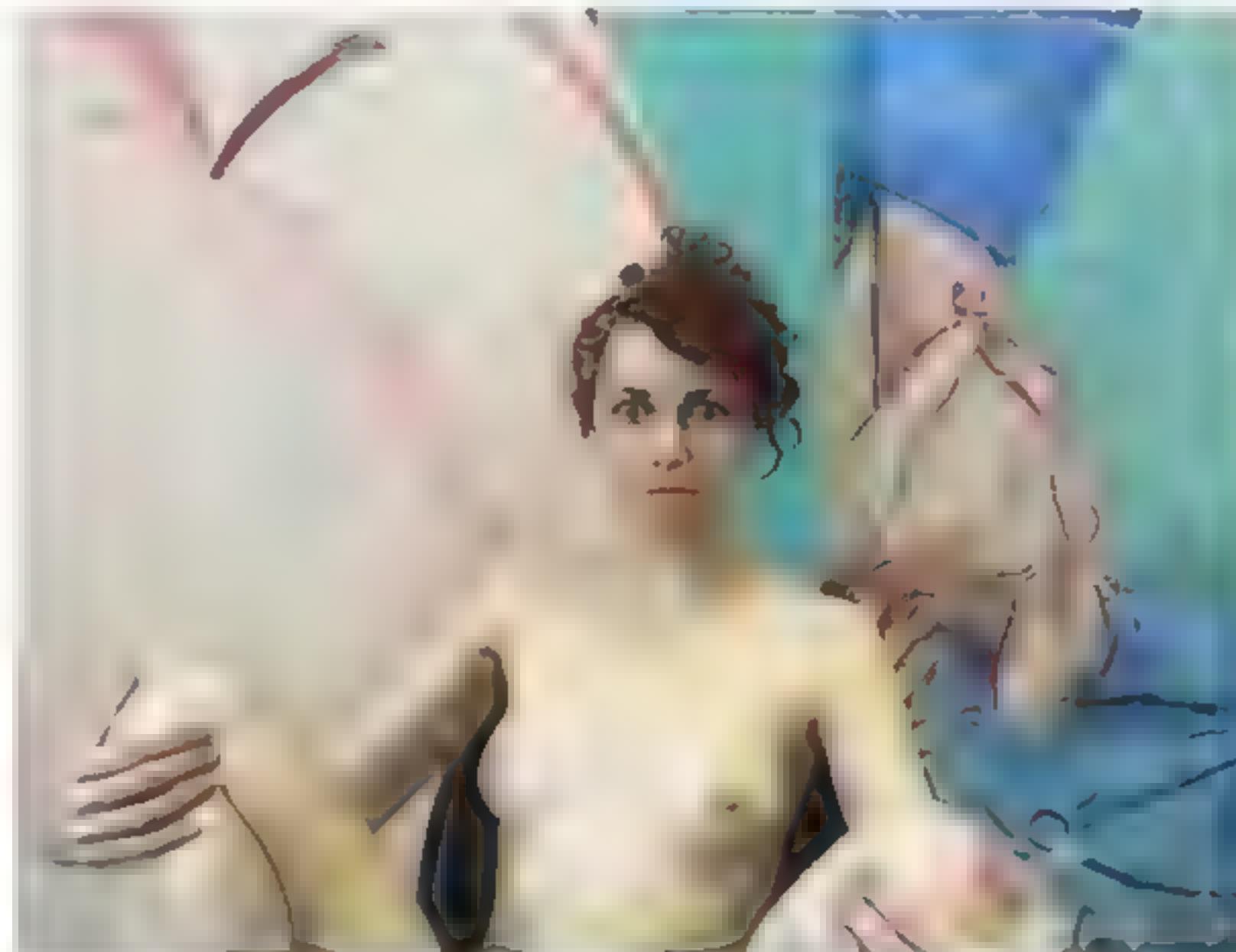
"No... um... of course not," I lied.

## THE TELLTALE COCKTAIL

or

## WHY ARE YOU STARING AT ME?

In which, despite the obstacles (you know who you are, Kristina) set MALICIOUSLY in his path, our long-suffering GENTLEMAN ARTIST attempts to penetrate THE MYSTERIES OF THE GAZE  
by  
*Jonathan Grossmalerman,*  
A PAINTER  
*of vaginas (mainly)*



Courtesy the artist

"Fantastic!!" she said. "Then let's proceed, shall we?" She returned to her position, revealing once again her outstandingly pink pussy.

But everything did not stay hunky dory for long.

Frankly, between you and me, I was distracted. The die had been cast for today's session. I bided my time pretending to choose colours and lining up my brushes in careful rows. How could I paint her when I could distinctly feel her gaze hitting me sharply on my face? How was I supposed to concentrate? There she was, her brow beginning to furrow with growing concern. No doubt stashing telling details into the rooms of her memory palace.

I looked up and smiled blandly, but her eyes met mine and it was I... I, Jonathan Grossmalerman, who turned away first. What was happening? How could I be so easily unsettled? I tried in vain to paint a ground colour but could hardly hold a brush for my shaking hands.

This was turning out to be the worst model session ever.

I had to pull myself together! I picked up my drink and took a long swig. Perhaps I could simply wait it out? Standing behind my easel, sheltered from her glare by my 2.5 x 3.5m painting. Perhaps that ogling beauty would forget I was even here and just leave! I just had to get very quiet.

Yes! That's it. I went still for what seemed like an eternity before she shattered the silence, calling out...

"Mr Grossmalerman? Are you hiding from me?"

I did not answer and a few more minutes passed.

"Mr Grossmalerman... I know you're there... I can hear the ice clinking in your drink."

My drink! My trembling hand had given me away! Oh damn this telltale cocktail! But does ice not melt? I'll just need to wait longer. That's it!

"Mr Grossmalerman? Do you want me to go?"

I'll give her this. Kristina with a K is a smart girl. She'll go far.

The ice melts and I disappear.



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Can you describe a government-owned institution that collaborates with many of the world's leading artists (among them Haegue Yang, Do Ho Su, Tabaimo, Richard Deacon, Ryan Gander, and Eko Nugroho) and that shows their work at major commercial art-fairs (among them the various iterations of Art Basel) as an 'offspace'? Generally the term, most commonly used in German-speaking countries, denotes a non-profit space that operates outside of the conventional (commercial or institutional) structures of the artworld, often at the vanguard of current artistic production. If the nonprofit Singapore Tyler Print Institute (STPI), which incorporates a commercial gallery operation to part-fund the experimental activities that take place in its print workshop, doesn't meet the first of these criteria in any other way than its geographical location (Singapore being well off the traditional map of art centres), it certainly meets the last. Perhaps, indeed, it fits the offspace criteria in a way all of its own.

Located in a restored 1921 warehouse along the Singapore River, the institute itself is centred around its print and paper presses, which were acquired by the government of Singapore from American Kenneth E. Tyler in 2002, in the wake of the maverick master-printer's retirement following almost four decades in the business. During that time he had worked with everyone from Josef Albers and Joan Mitchell to David Hockney, Frank Stella and Roy Lichtenstein, latterly on the East Coast of the US. Much of the equipment – offering lithography, etching, relief and silkscreen printing – had been custom assembled by Tyler himself, who oversaw its installation following the transition to Singapore. Here, under the direction of Emi Eu, working with chief printer Eitaro Ogawa and gallery director Rita Targui, the institute offers residences to international artists (Carsten Höller, Tobias Rehberger, Anri Sala and Rirkrit Tiravanija occupied the onsite apartments this past January, taking the cumulative total number of residents at STPI well past 70), many of whom are not especially known for operating in the medium of print or works on paper, and encourages radical experimentation (artists



## Offspace: SINGAPORE TYLER PRINT INSTITUTE

*The twenty-sixth  
instalment in ArtReview's  
guide to the most-  
interesting-yet-sometimes-  
overlooked independent  
ARTSPACES, CENTRES  
or just plain SHACKS from  
around the world*

**This time somewhat  
stretching the definition  
of what an offspace can be.  
In a good way**

*By this month's traveller  
Mark Rappolt*



*top* Ryan Gander, *Hokusai's Blues*, 2014, cyanotype, screenprint with natural indigo pigment, Saunders 638g paper, 135 x 195 cm, edition of 2. © the artist/STPI

*left* The papermill at STPI. © STPI

can manufacture their own paper, and experiment with different processes and techniques of printing). Do Ho Suh, for example, extracted stitched sketches from fabric and then set them into paper, Haegue Yang printed with spices and vegetables, while Australia-based Singaporean Suzanne Victor's exhibition earlier this year featured a mix of lenses, printed mobiles and more conventional works on paper. On my last visit, Höller, Rehberger, Sala and Tiravanija appeared to be working on some sort of epic exquisite corpse. The end products of all this – which often take forms that might just as easily be described as sculpture and installation rather than conventional prints – wind up in the hands of both private collectors and major public institutions (among them MOMA).

As well as being a venue for the display of all that experimentation and research (the institute also operates education and public talks programmes aimed at local audiences), STPI's 400sqm gallery also hosts historical exhibitions – such as last summer's *Edo Pop: The Graphic Impact of Japanese Prints*, featuring 60 Ukiyo-e or Ukiyo-e-inspired works from the collection of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts – that explore the history and traditions of printmaking and works on paper. In effect, as well as being a centre for practical artistic experimentation, STPI is becoming a centre for artistic dialogue operating at both professional and public levels. And thanks to the necessarily openminded approach of its staff – which allows the institution (rapidly becoming a key hub for the art scene in the Asia-Pacific region) to operate both as a slightly quirky offspace and as a miniature public museum – it's also a convenient introductory point for artists, curators and collectors visiting Singapore and the territories around it. Perhaps most important of all, and despite the seriousness of its mission, that focus on experiment and pushing the limits makes STPI the centre for an awful lot of fun.

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## 2015 AWARDS

### WHAT WILL TIME DO TO YOU?

Lucy Dorey

2015

Lucy Dorey

2015

2015

2015

JERWOOD FVU AWARDS

## 2014 AWARDS

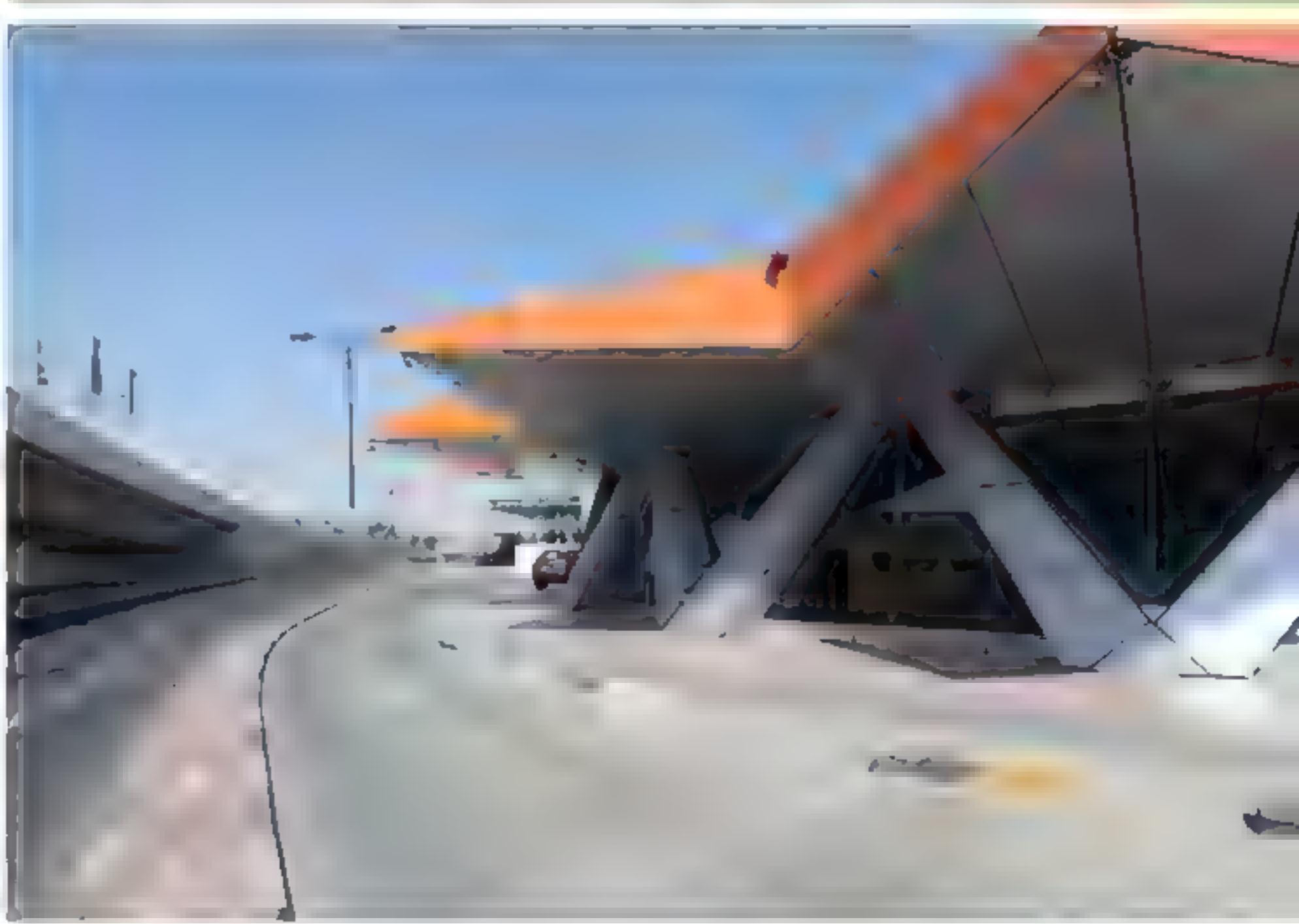
### BORROWED TIME

Exhibition, 2014, theme of  
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< 2014-08-08>

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# Great Critics and Their Ideas

No 36

## Lord Krishna on the art industry

Interview by

*Matthew Collings*

The One Who is  
Limitless and Endless

speaks of

the ATTRACTION  
& REPULSION  
of flayed BODIES

&  
HEADS with holes  
in them, THE BLUES,  
DERANGED PEOPLE  
on the radio, THINGS

that can be called ART,  
the grotesque global ART INDUSTRY,  
death-obsessed MAD PEOPLE

&  
certain ideas  
in the HINDU RELIGIOUS SYSTEM



*Lord Krishna is one of the many deities of Hinduism.*

*Most mythologies state that he departed from  
his material body 5,000 years ago (on 17/18 February  
3102 BC) before returning as a celestial entity.*

*Historians agree that worship of Krishna is unlikely  
to have commenced earlier than the fourth century BC.*

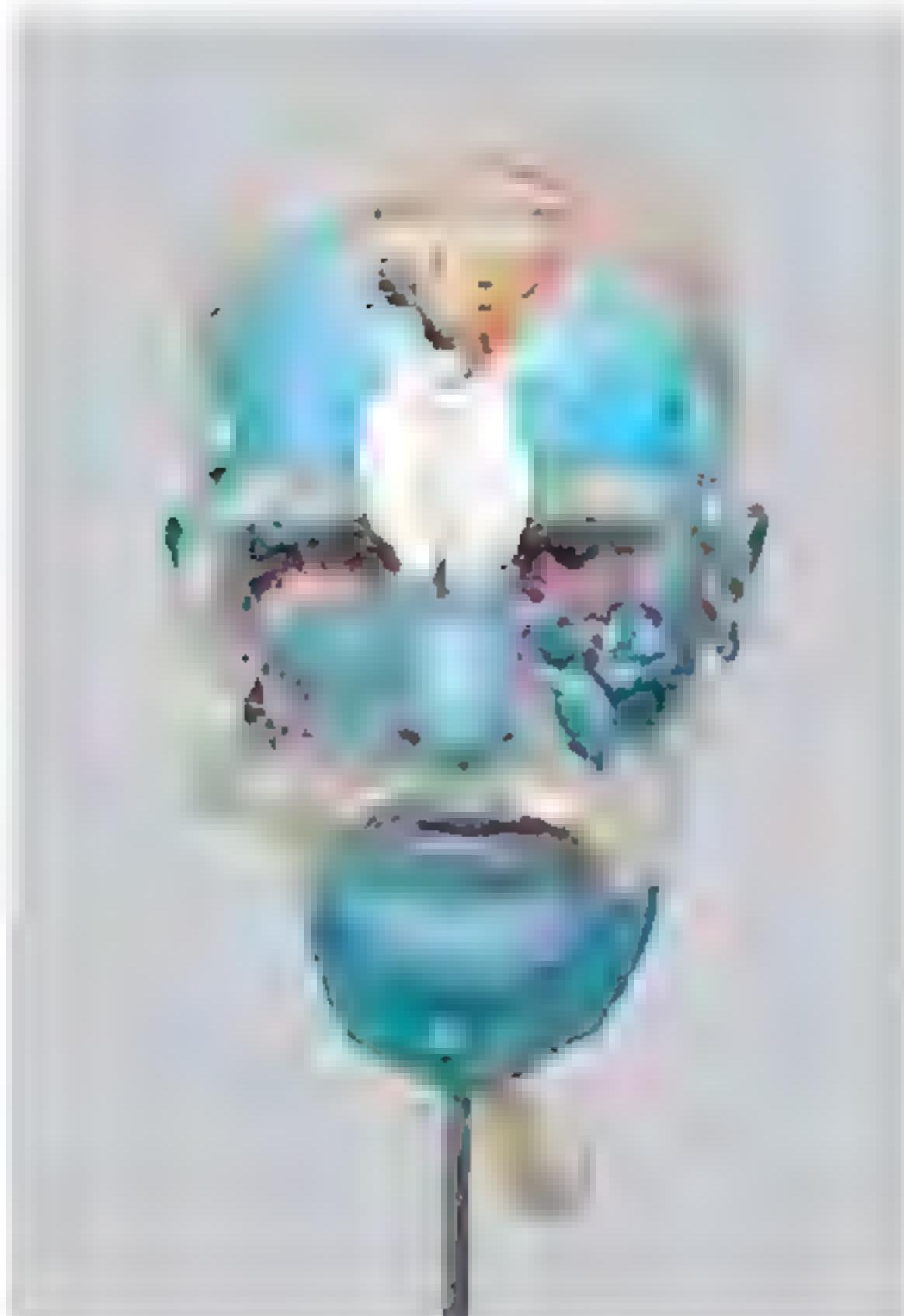
**LORD KRISHNA** I am listed at number 57 in the book of the thousand names of Vishnu. He is the main form of God. Everything is a manifestation of Him. I am frequently considered the Supreme Being myself. My name means 'dark blue' or 'one who is dark'.

**AR** What are you doing here?

**LK** Seeing some shows. I saw the Polke retrospective. Everything had a feeling about it of, 'Oh I've got to do an illustration for a *Sunday Times* schizophrenia article this morning; I'll knock it off quick.' I think for confused minds he is important, but I found it easy to remain uninvolved.

**AR** Anything you liked more?

**LK** At the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris I saw David Altmejd. Usually I don't care about art made of flayed bodies or heads with holes in them. I think, 'Oh yes, another artist grabbing attention.' But I was impressed by the sheer creativity. He starts with something and he goes on and on following up the possibilities. He gets a body and scoops a bit out and puts some crystals in the hole, and he does something with the viscera, he puts it here and he puts it there, so it becomes logical to see the hairs on a male body as an idea about texture, and viscera as squeezed paint laid out on a hairy leg like a palette. There is an endless production of metaphors. We are reminded that we see things the way we see them because of our awareness of our bodies. At least, not mine, because I'm immortal. But he captures how I'd see things if I were you.



**AR** Is blue your favourite colour? Do you like Yves Klein?

**LK** Blue is just how I'm pictured in art. Rama is blue. Shiva is blue. We're all one. Your questions connect to idea systems that are actually quite separate.

**AR** Well, do you like art based on colour?

**LK** I heard some deranged people on the radio reviewing the Rubens exhibition at the Royal Academy recently and confidently braying that he is too heroic and Rembrandt is better. They had no idea they were even looking at colour. He gives it a life independent of depiction. In a lion-hunting scene every colour has a repeat somewhere in a slightly different register. And somewhere there is an answering opposite: a muted version or a heightened, stinging one. There are many colour configurations discernible that appear to organise the whole painting. You begin to realise that in relation to each other they set up further rhythms. The painting is in fact all about such multiplications. They are 'there' in the sense that he created them to be there, but they are also rather hidden or half hidden, or perceptible but not obvious. This controlled indeterminacy is his way of connecting colour to reality, how things in the world are actually seen. It is regardless of allegorical narrative, intellectual framework or religious worldview. That is, regardless of ideology. And it is to do with the viewer's active, alert seeing of what Rubens has done, finding out what is there and what can be known, as much as him attempting to mesmerise a viewer.

**AR** Psychologists have proved that people find blue calming.

**LK** It may or may not be true that they have done that. But a more relevant set of questions about colour psychology would be: how has the blue of the Madonna's robe in a Raphael been treated? What colours are put next to it? And how are the perimeters of the blue colour-area subtly different to other parts of the same area so that adjoining colour areas can be caused to seem to vibrate?

**AR** Why is that interesting? Isn't it just technical?

**LK** A Madonna is a symbol, but to picture such a thing you need powers that are not merely symbolic. You have to have real experience of using colour and making it work visually, and this comes from the history of decorative

*left* David Altmejd, *Untitled*, 2011,  
Photo: Jessica Eckert. © the artist.  
Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

*facing page* Statue of Krishna, Sri Mariamman Temple, Singapore, 2011. Photo: M. Trischler

and depictive objects. There are all sorts of visual traditions built up over centuries.

**AR** OK, well, name something from the fifth century.

**LK** In the Ajanta caves in Aurangabad in India there are large-scale frescos depicting dancers painted exactly then. It's clear the artists were sophisticated colourists. Forms and materials are manipulated so that what is depicted seems full of animation and power. And colour relationships play a major role in this achievement. The same traditions reappear in Indian art from a much later period, the miniatures produced under Islamic rule in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. They draw you into a world of manipulated colour that has immense visual power simply because of the varying of a few textures, and the division and subdivision of a few geometric shapes. Visual traditions are subtle; they never entirely disappear, they go underground and reemerge, they alter, but there is always a trace.

**AR** Rodchenko's monochromes are different to Klein's, aren't they? I never know why.

**LK** In both cases the question might arise why the artist did it. Is it a statement about the end of the necessity for artists to bother with colour relationships, maybe even a statement about the end of art? Should art exist? Or maybe the statement is more like, 'All of us in society right now must rethink why art exists?' That was certainly a preoccupation among a certain group of artists in Russia when Rodchenko painted his primary-colour monochromes.

**AR** Should art always be seen so critically and analytically? What's wrong with just enjoying it?

**LK** Seeing analytically and critically is how art is enjoyed. It's about heightened seeing.

**AR** There's a vast scene now catering to a popular audience. It's unrealistic to demand that they go around enjoying art in that way.

**LK** What is the vastness for, then? If it can't cope with the thing it's supposed to be about, we might as well admit that the corporatisation of art is finally accomplished.

**AR** What's the point of your godliness, what purpose does it serve?

**LK** I'm the personification of certain ideas in the Hindu religious system. But a god is always immortal. We have seen and experienced everything. In my case I am seated in everyone's heart, and from me come remembrance, knowledge and forgetfulness. Remembrance is very important. Adorno said that in bourgeois society humanity divests itself of memory and breathlessly exhausts itself in continuously conforming to what is immediately present.

AR *Do you think art has soul?*

LK At a certain historical moment art became a matter of authentic subjectivity, yes, and this remains the most important issue. It's another Frankfurt School precept that the fate of art in bourgeois culture is identified with the fate of subjectivity, as art is identified with the autonomy of the individual subject in a social context. Everything those paranoid anticapitalist intellectuals and philosophers predicted has in fact come about.

AR *At ArtReview we always prefer art done by artists whose galleries take out expensive advertising.*

LK I totally see your logic. At these galleries one often sees art lacking any reason to exist except to be processed by the art industry. To look at any of the objects and have thoughts about meaning, and so forth, would be to fall into a serious category error. All the 'thoughts' are supplied already, anyway, by professionals whose job it is to put together hilarious word mashups: reviews, press releases, artists' lists of their important concerns and so on. Not to mention of course helpful comments from art advisers.

AR *What's your proof that artists just want to serve the art industry?*

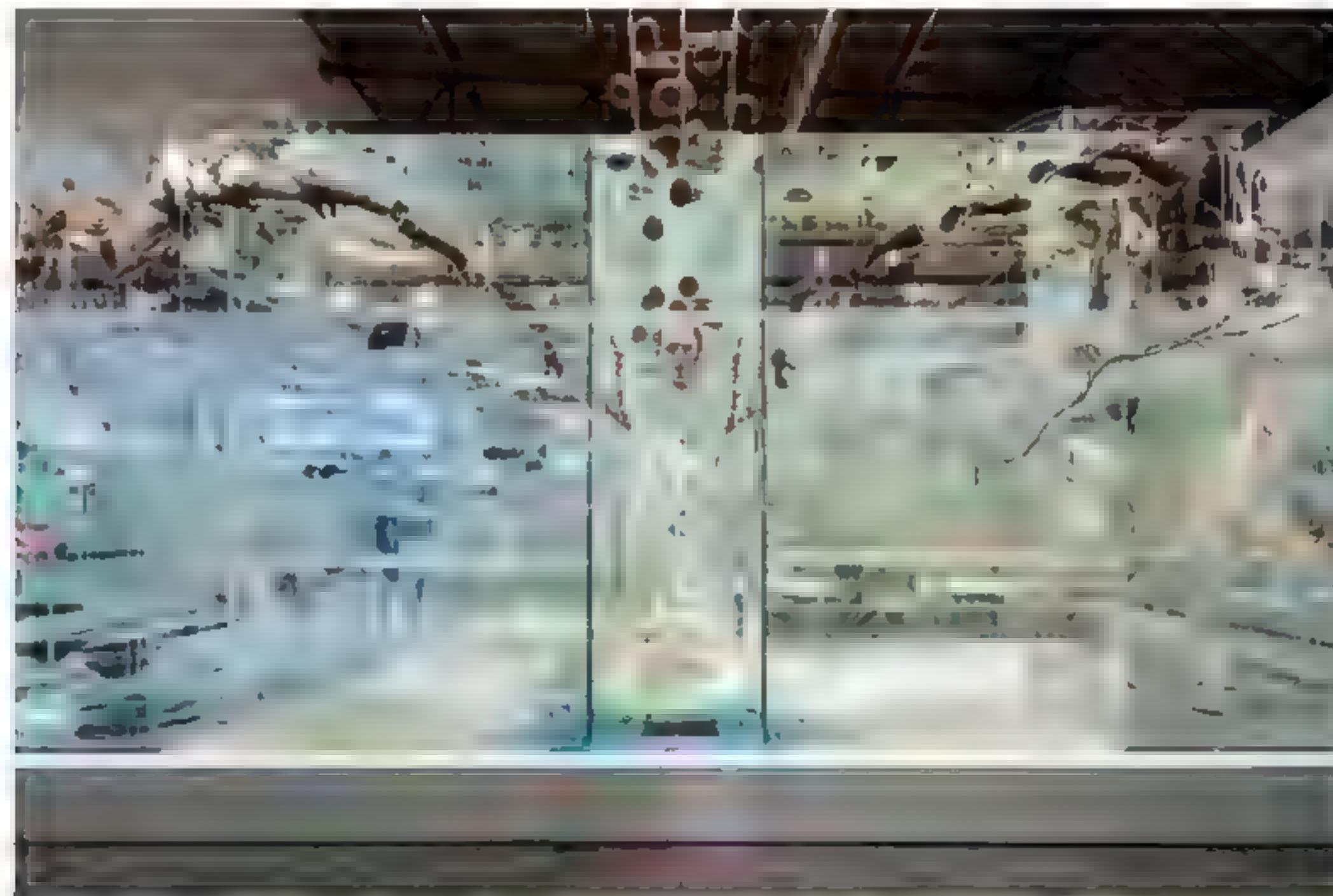
LK Today, artworks are created out of all sorts of intentions. To be noticed, to raise people's consciousness, to be in the moment, to express joy, to explore materials, to serve a bloated and foolish corporatist, ghastly, death-ridden artworld that itself serves death-obsessed mad people (presumably this wouldn't be a conscious intention). But then the object takes its place with others more or less like it by which it can be understood, judged and appreciated. So at that point what is more important than intentions is the question of what the object is doing in relation to all the other objects that have been called 'art'. And if all it seems to be doing is allowing a grotesque global art industry that has recently evolved to go on expanding, then, as a viewer who might wish to have a different subjectivity than that of a zombie, you might want to find something in art that is different to the rationale of that particular artwork.

AR *Surely everything's in that industry now, good stuff and bad stuff like always?*

LK Art can be in it but not wholly of it or entirely produced by it. An artist might initially intend to add something to a glamorous and powerful scene and thereby become glamorous too. But they get involved in the internal logic of what they're making.

They could be Altmejd, for example, taking Matthew Barney seriously. But then he goes in his own direction and that logic of making multiplies and rather than resisting he follows it up and the process results in objects that exceed the bland signs of modernity and fake-alterity that the art industry demands. These are objects that have a wholly different power. They make the viewer alert to life instead of sending him or her into a walking coma. It's interesting to reflect, since we're talking here in Britain, that historically British art schools were founded to serve industry. They were late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century offshoots of factories. Pottery, glazing and other crafts were taught in them, as well as certain kinds of high art that also had a utilitarian purpose. The schools literally served the factories whose owners paid for them to be built. Eventually the same schools became ivory towers of high-art divorced from everyday reality. And now there is a grimly ironic return to industry, where students are conditioned to forget the high-art phase and instead become robotic content providers for the new art-industry.

**NEXT MONTH** Baudrillard on Chinese contemporary art depicting Mao ironically



*The Flux and The Puddle (detail)*, 2014

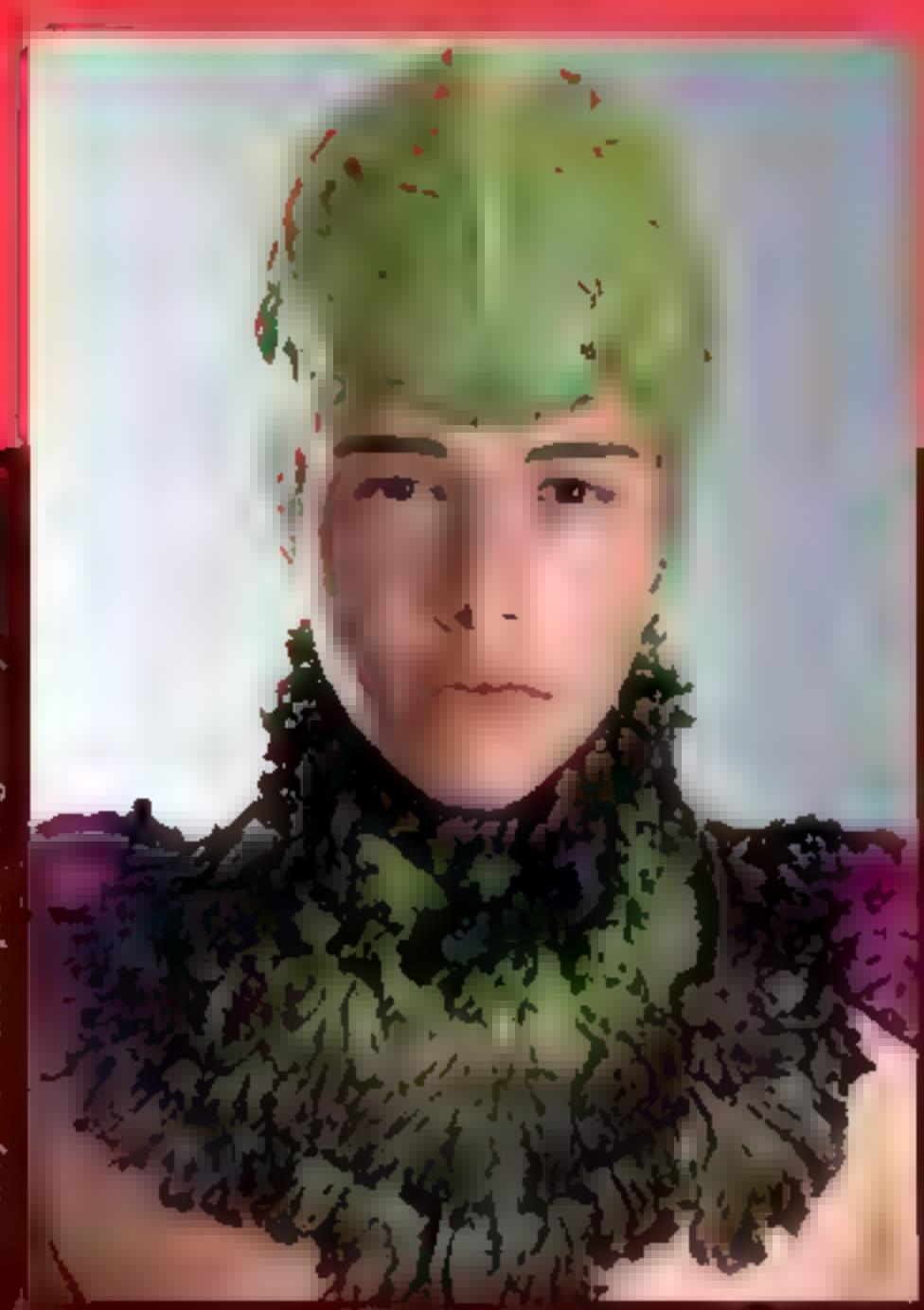
Photo: James Ewing

© David Altmejd. Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York



## Arabian Wings literally supports contemporary arts in **MENA**

celebration of arts and culture in Saudi Arabia.



Artwork by Hamza Jamjoom "Vergenabekty"

large number of visitors, in addition to the organizing entity, Arabian Wings, the brainchild of Mr. Mohamed Bahrawi and Mrs. Najlaa Felemban, which has been supporting arts in Saudi Arabia and across the Arab Region for ten years.

iart is the highlight of the month-long exhibition program in Jeddah and comprises key shows and arts media, including Art Bus, the launch of the first contemporary arts magazine MYN, 3-D Mapping Light

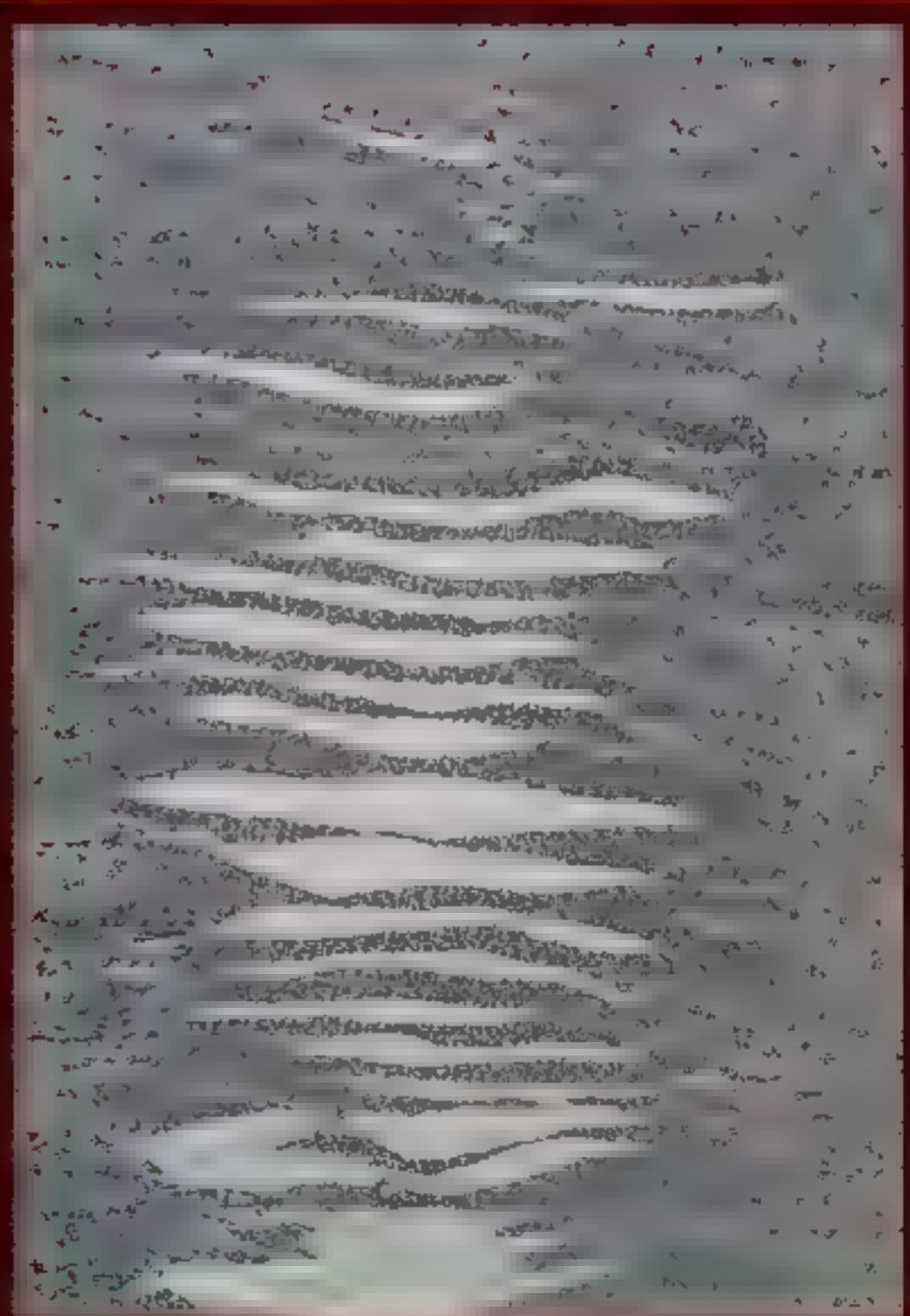


Artwork by Fadi Al-Nasir "The Padi Photo"

Show, and most significantly more than 250 participating visual artists, including Heba Abor, Khaled Bin Ali, and Majeedah Tash Al-Tukais, Kamal Banjer, Itab Al Al Shaikh, Sara AL Sudairy, Ali Al Hassan, Rawan Al Barakati, Walid Jahan, Ibtesam Ghazder, Tamer Rageb, Hassan Khan, Samer Al Halaki, Rabee AL Akhrass, Shrooq Al Hashimi, Hamza Jamjoom, H.R.H. Princess Hayfa Al Saud and H.R.H. Princess Fahda Al Saud.

iart has been described as the beginning of a Saudi biennale and an essential beginning of an art fair at the same time. With 100,000 visitors and a show area of over 6000 square meters, a magazine, and an art bus, alongside other shows, it has all the ingredients to be named the most prominent event and hence deserves the name "iart".

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Artwork by Sara Al Sudairy "Samrny"

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# Future Greats



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## Introduction

Attentive readers may have surmised that the title of this section implies the artists featured here are on the road to somewhere. Somewhere 'great'. But what does that mean these days? Frequently we hear complaints that 'greatness' in contemporary art is a value that's only measured in monetary terms. That a great artist is an expensive artist. And that a selection like this one is merely a shopping list for people interested in making a quick buck.

And of course, that kind of success has since happened to many of the artists who've been included in the 'Future Greats' selection during its ten years of existence. Others have become better known (and perhaps more wealthy – who knows? *ArtReview* still seems to be picking up the bill when it 'does lunch' with them) because of the awards they've won or been nominated for and the biennials and museum shows in which they've been included. A more or less random selection of artists featured over the past decade includes Cao Fei, Cory Arcangel and Paul Chan (2005); Thomas Houseago, Thomas Zipp and Adel Abdessemed (2007); Bharti Kher, Nathalie Djurberg and Oscar Tuazon (2008); Renzo Martens, Luke Fowler and Julieta Aranda (2009); Marvin Gaye (at that time Spartacus) Chetwynd, Paweł Althamer and the Bruce High Quality Foundation (2010); Trevor Paglen, Ed Atkins, Elizabeth Price and Helen Marten (2011); Neil Beloufa, Analia Saban and Petrit Halilaj (2012); Benedict Drew, Samara Golden and Paulo Nazareth (2013).

Just the other day, *ArtReview* learned that two relatively ugly bronze sculptures of naked men riding panthers that were until recently thought to be by a sixteenth-century Dutch artist are now being attributed to Michelangelo. Does this mean they're now 'great'? Judging by the fuss it's making, the British press seems to think so. But then why weren't they so 'great' when they were thought to be by the not-so-famous Dutch artist, given that they have looked and felt the same ever since they were made? Pursue this line of thought too far and there will be little to distinguish the world of art from the worlds of advertising and marketing.

Which in many ways, really, is where the artworld finds itself today (as might the second paragraph of this text, heh heh). Much as the 'real' world does too – the British Army just established a 77th Brigade to fight 'non-lethal warfare' on Facebook and Twitter. But *ArtReview*'s not going to give you some sort of lecture about how the artworld's faults are merely a reflection of the faults of the real world. It's happy to leave that to someone like Paul Virilio. It is interested, however, in where all this leaves the artists featured on the following pages.

The artists featured here are nominated by a group of what we might call, for the sake of argument, 'experts'. This means a collection of artists, curators and even critics, spanning a broad slice of geography, interests and motivations. They're experts thanks to the extent to which they are invested in the production and development of art in various territories (they see a lot of art and talk to a lot of artists) and because they have particular ideas about what art is or should be. And yes, broadly speaking they were asked to nominate artists because *ArtReview* is sympathetic to their ideas. They were tasked by *ArtReview* with nominating artists they think are going to be changing the way *ArtReview* thinks about art over the coming year, but about whom *ArtReview* might not have yet heard anything; mainly because – despite what art-fair directors seem to think – *ArtReview* can't be everywhere all of the time. And *ArtReview* assumes that's

the case with most of you too. (By the way, did *ArtReview* ever tell you that it used to have a reader who counted the number of times it mentioned itself in articles, and wrote in disapprovingly with the totals from each issue? That reader would have had a field day with this one, if only he hadn't got lazy and given up.)

Anyhow! Enough about *ArtReview*. This is all about the artists. And *ArtReview* can promise you that they will be interesting – perhaps even a preview of where contemporary art around the world is heading next. The rest – the greatness bit – is out of *ArtReview*'s hands. Sort of. Because in the end, *ArtReview* still thinks that there *is* such a thing as greatness, beyond the hype and the money, and it wants to find out what it might look like, and where it might be coming from. *ArtReview*

### Sponsor's statement

This is the fourth year that EFG International has been associated with *ArtReview* and its Future Greats issue. Over that time it has been fascinating to watch many of the artists mentioned in these pages go on to achieve further renown in the world of art and beyond. At EFG International we're used to keeping up with the rapid pace of change, and it's been a pleasure to support a feature that tracks similar developments in art. Not only that, but we've been proud to witness the expanded geographic reach that our support of this partnership has enabled. This year's edition features nominated artists with the greatest variety of nationalities and backgrounds so far, its representatives based everywhere from Vietnam and China to Brazil and Hungary, from South Africa, Ukraine and Colombia to the traditional art centres in Europe and the US. And while the increasingly comprehensive coverage of global art scenes can make the world seem a smaller place, it also reveals it to be more diverse than many of us would expect.

All of this resonates strongly with us at EFG International: the development of emerging new talent, an ever more comprehensive global scope and the expression of a consequently diverse range of interests and passions. And crucially, as it is in the arts, passion is at the heart of what we do.

Keith Gapp  
Head of Strategy and Marketing, EFG International  
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In this world, each day stranger, Jarbas Lopes retains an amateur spirit, and even more: an amorous spirit. Much is said of art and life; sometimes it would be better to think of art and love. It is love that transforms, like art, the multiple relations between beings and things. Jarbas Lopes weaves, also literally, new relations between so many things. He embraces many adventures in his adventure. It's an action impregnated with the popular universe, on many fronts. He lives utopia fully, in the imagination and in several realities, parallel and convergent. Jarbas Lopes thinks the future today.

*Translated from the Portuguese by Pedro Cid Proença*



*Desenho Elástico*, 2014.  
Photo: Edouard Fraipont. Courtesy Galeria Luisa Strina, São Paulo

Born and based in Rio de Janeiro, Jarbas Lopes has exhibited his diverse output at A Gentil Carioca Gallery, Rio de Janeiro; Galeria Luisa Strina, São Paulo; and Tilton Gallery, New York, as well as the Biennale de Lyon in 2011 and the Gwangju Biennial in 2008.

Selected by Fernanda Gomes, artist, Rio de Janeiro.



*Here*, 2013, coffee on canvas, 107 x 99 cm. Courtesy the artist and Luce Gallery, Turin

The Guru lyric 'more milk than Louis Pasteur' appears in the title of one of Robert Davis's paintings, and to me it's a great analogue for his particular combination of swagger and sincerity. He's usurping familiar forms of painting and turning them to new purpose with references and materials that often lie outside the fine arts. Like a lyricist pushing the structure of a traditional rhyme to absurdity, Davis is using stylistic conventions to his own end, disrupting their meanings and giving the structure itself new urgency.

At the same time his art is also stubborn. It insists on a literal world of ordinary objects and things that are constantly eroding painting's promises of singularity and transcendence. This obstinate materialism is obvious in his installations, where the paintings are integrated with furniture he himself fabricates. Rather than sculptures refusing their use value, the benches, beds and tables intentionally assert their function while maintaining, in the context of an exhibition, a perverse dysfunction.

A recent body of work, *Compton* (2014), inspired by the LA Raiders Starter jacket, is an example of this commitment to the dense accumulation of conflicting meanings in a physical object. The Raiders jacket (as popularised by NWA) was intensely symbolic and became, in the visual culture of 1980s West Coast hip-hop, a coded form of

resistance and collective identity. Rob is always obliquely working this shared ground between aesthetics and politics, in this instance the power of the stylistic and visual challenges (rather than purely linguistic or discursive ones) that hip-hop made to police brutality and the criminalisation of the black male body in 1980s Los Angeles. But what's exciting for me about Rob's paintings is that they are never really determined by singular political or historical meanings – instead he focuses our attention precisely on objects as sites of over-investment that continually resist these associations, maintaining their objecthood.

Although there's a way in which, then, this work is about failure: Rob's belief in the inexhaustibility of our relationship to objects, the infinite number of stories we might be able to tell, the infinite number of lives the object might live, creates the endless possibility of new stories, new forms, new experiences.

And that is probably the most important point, one that extends from Davis's work in the artist collective Law Office during the mid-

1990s and his later collaborative painting practice with Mike Langlois. Art is a system, but it is a social system. Like language it can be both arbitrary and adaptive. Fundamentally it is about connectivity, the interpenetration of the thing itself and our experience of it.

*Born in Chicago, now based in Brooklyn, Robert Davis has been creating work that abstracts the foundation substances of artistic practice – beer, wine, coffee, cigarette ash; this following an intense period of (supernatural, representational) collaborative painting with Michael Langlois, their work shown at MCA Chicago in 2009.*

*Selected by Rashid Johnson, artist, New York.*



*Spectacular Telón Toluca 111*, 2014, hand-dyed and -stitched canvas,  
plus edition 7 of 20 of artist book *Entrecortinas: abre, corre, jala*, 295 × 352 cm

I first experienced Pia Camil's work one afternoon in 2010 while walking on one of downtown Mexico City's avenues. From high up in a tall office building, a long red banner flowed and waved in the air, beckoning. It read: 'Pia Camil for Sale' (*For Sale*, 2010). I noticed the art crowd going in and so I followed them. On the umpteenth floor of the building, a woman, Camil, was actually wearing the banner as a cape, holding it in place – or perhaps it was holding her. She played the drums while Brett Schultz (of Yautepèc gallery) played the guitar. The afternoon city light came in slanted and people sat on the floor. Camil seemed to be tied down yet flying, pushing, fighting.

A similar spirit is embodied in her later piece *No A Trío A* (2013), where Camil reinterprets Yvonne Rainer's eponymous choreography. Or perhaps it would be better to say she 'wrestles with it', as one does with one's history. Camil was bound and tied, S&M-style, to a 50m-long piece of cloth that traversed the Casa Encendida in Madrid, while she attempted to follow the choreography steps, and failed due to her many physical constraints – an embodied *essai*.

Her concern with bodily work and the female body specifically is part of what links this body (pardon the pun) of work to Camil's *Espectacular* series (2011-ongoing), which beg the questions: how to make something out

of erasure and blight? How to slow down the speed of consumer culture? How to transform spectacle? How to make the public private – intimate, even? And where does our body, or the feminised if not female body, fit in all this? The slowness of these works' process counters the industrial origin of the visual aspect of the work: the landscapes of capitalist failure that are then activated as beautiful backdrops. Starting from the ruins of *Highway Follies* (2011) and *Rise into Ruin* (2013), her hand-coloured photographs that recuperate abandoned buildings on the side of the road; and then moving through a painstaking and elaborate process of fabrication, hand-dyeing and stitching that makes up the defunct advertising billboards she reappropriates as paintings, curtains, installations and vases for the *Espectaculares*, Camil domesticates publicity and gives a new setting and dimension to the debris of mass consumerism.

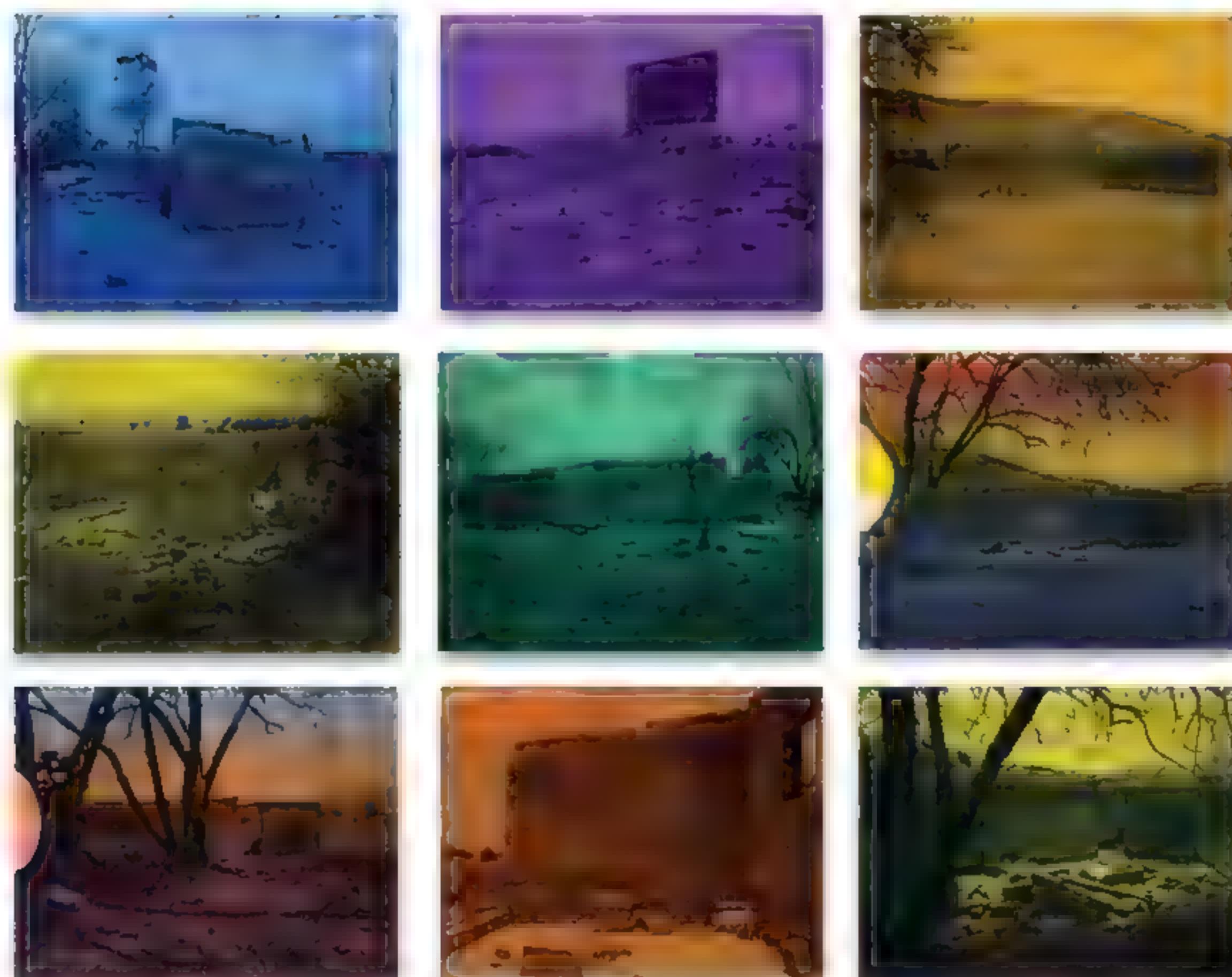
It has been my pleasure to write texts on Camil's work in the past and observe her work process for her shows at Sultana, Paris (2013); OMR in Mexico City (2014) and most recently, *The Little Dog Laughed* at Blum & Poe, Los Angeles (2014). And it can be your pleasure as well, for this year she has an upcoming solo exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, and she will be a part of Frieze Projects in New York.

*Pia Camil has recently had solo exhibitions in her native Mexico City as well as in LA, Paris and Vitoria, Spain, and will show later this year at CAC, Cincinnati. Her ceramic and stitched-canvas works redeploying font fragments from abandoned billboards are created alongside performances that nod to the artist's alter role in the art-rock band El Resplendor.*

*Selected by Gabriela Jauregui, writer, Mexico City*



*Rise into Ruin*, 2013, inkjet print, 39×47×5 cm



*Highway Follies, Tula*, 2011,  
portfolio of 9 inkjet prints, 35×45 cm each, edition 3 of 4 + 1AP

all images Courtesy OMR, Mexico City

I guess you could say Maeve Brennan's work comes through a research and documentary approach, culminating – mostly – in video installations. But I've never really registered it in such categorical terms. It is immediately much more resonant and absorbing for its subject matter, its motifs, but most especially for the sense of what it is as a practice. It is work born out of a commitment to slowness, to unassuming curiosity and to the idea of the journey. Something significant and indeed truthful about seeking out proximity and trying to place and track experiences and understandings, to whatever degree this is possible.

It is a practice that takes her presently to the Middle East, having just finished the Home Workspace Program at Ashkal Alwan (which is now helping to fund her next film) in Beirut. This new work, in its early stages, already proposes something of a compellingly recurrent

Since graduating from Goldsmiths, University of London, in 2012, Maeve Brennan has turned her attention from her native city to the fraught borders and knotty politics of the Middle East. Her film *Beit Iksa Boys* (2013), which followed a Home Workspace Program residency at Ashkal Alwan in Beirut, has been shortlisted for the 2015 Alwan 3rd Awards Competition

Selected by Phillip Lai, artist, London.

motif for her: the appearance in some way of the substance of stone or rock, as compressed history – figuring variously as oil-bearing rock, as terrain, as architectural foundation and form. The transitioning between natural, cultural and political makes a comparison with Robert Smithson's 'abstract geology' tempting.

With a work that is so much about people and places, the conceptually mutable presence of rock and stone might seem to be a background subject. But, in practice, there is a resolute sense of materiality and abstraction – a desire for tangibility that must also deal with the frustration and resilience of hard matter. A question of the inert, perhaps, which reminds me of a random but telling conversation we had about explosive rock blasting. It is a practice, then, that in its humane and patient account of how something has been shaped, is trying to get close to and involved with what might yet be latent.



*Beit Iksa Boys 1* (video still), 2013, video, 8 min.

Courtesy the artist



*Path of Exile: Poor Joys Asylum 1*, 2014, oil on wooden panel, 180 x 127 cm.  
Courtesy the artist and Josh Lilley, London

Vicky Wright is a kind of alchemist. Alchemy isn't real, of course. Neither is witchcraft, the occult or magic. Yet in her paintings Wright manages to invoke a sense of the esoteric and the irrational, not because she has a true belief in them (she's too reasonable for that), but because they serve as ways to open painting up to different critical dimensions and affective registers, allow the act of painting to speculate on its own potential lack of proper limits, in the face of critical fashions that continuously delimit what's supposed to be relevant and what's not. Zombie abstraction? Wright's painting happily absorbs those corpses and skewers them with electrodes to make them dance. Post-Internet virtuality? Wright's painting laughs and declares, 'Long live the New Flesh.'

The strange work of Wright's paintings lies somewhere between figuration and sheer painterly self-reference. A lush, layered, smeared, dribbling accumulation of marks assembles, where none sits innocently on the surface – wide, striated brushloads of paint angle and veer in ways that begin to carve and sculpt themselves into bizarre planes and volumes, lifting away from the wood grain of the panels on which Wright always paints.

But the counterintuitive alchemy Wright performs is to make abstract painterly marks that shift, without one quite realising it, into the appearance of literal objects that have no referent in the real world. Perception's tendency to project form into the formless plays weird tricks. Marks become the pages of books, or the beaks of birds, or dismembered torsos. Flecks of white glinting in little whorls of blackness conjure the apprehension of tiny eyes, speckled among the queasy spectacle of paint warping itself into something vaguely horrible and animated. Detail is carefully suggested in Wright's

paintings, but dissolves as you get close. Psychedelic, phantasmagoric, these abstractions have a grotesque, gothic energy, which harks back to Dürer and Bosch, but resist their visual resolution by remaining in a state of in-between unnameability, with more than a nod to the edge-of-cognition paranoia of H.P. Lovecraft.

In her most recent works Wright takes on the (father) figures of modernist abstraction, bringing fiercely vivid strips and spots of primary colours into her paintings' more typically tertiary gloom, simultaneously warring with and articulating the chaos of marks around them. If Wright is a big fan of the antirational philosophy of the likes of Gilles Deleuze and Jean-François Lyotard, she seems equally fascinated, in these latest paintings, by the quasi-mysticism that often underpinned the geometric abstraction of painters such as Malevich and Mondrian; geometry has always been central to magic, after all. Winding through these entanglements is a play on gender and irrationality, through an attention to form and formlessness. It's not by accident that Wright cites the early feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman's account of her postpartum psychosis, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892). If witchcraft and hysteria were once the negative (feminine) opposites of the more masculine virtues of religious revelation or artistic genius, these tropes are appropriated by Wright to complicate our understanding of painting's role as a site of mastery, self-dissolution and desire.

Bolton-born, and now London-based, Vicky Wright explores the artworld's underside – quite literally painting on reversed panels. Touching on structures of control, subjugation and fantasy, her layered, muddled figuration teases with aesthetic grabs from the medieval to contemporary gaming culture. Successive series have been shown in three solo outings since 2010 at the Josh Lilley gallery, London.

Selected by J.J. Charlesworth, associate editor, ArtReview.

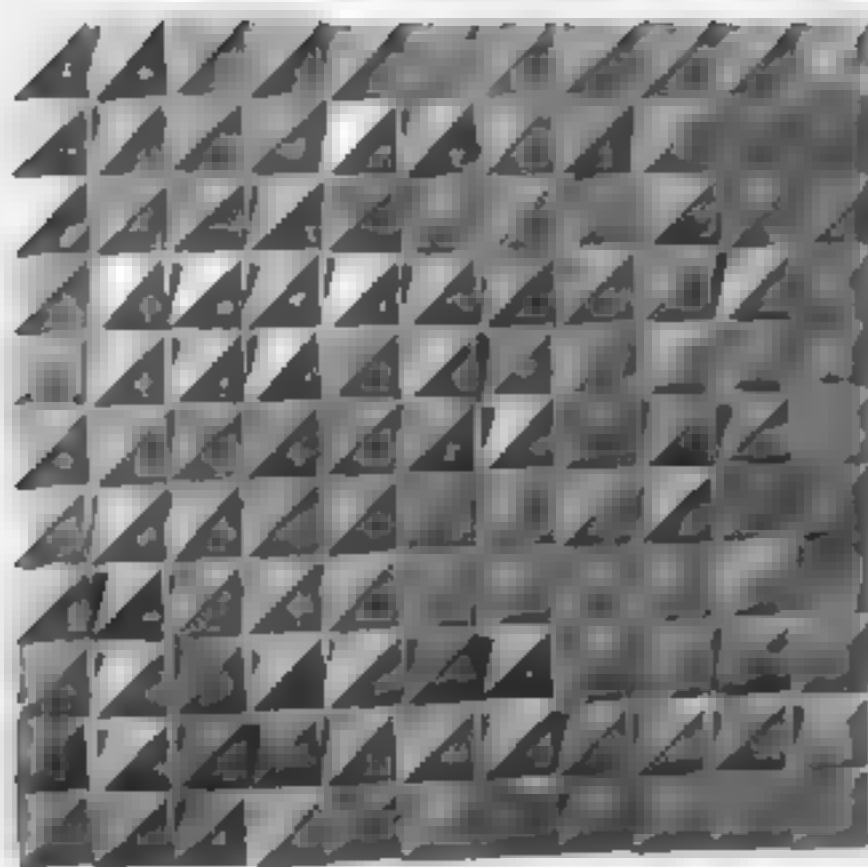
In the face of the dissolution of painting into art-historical lounge-decoration or post-digital academic morbidity, Wright demonstrates that what painting is, and what it can achieve, is determined by the scope of the thinking you bring to it, and the unknown figures you release in the process.



*Threshold Series*, 2012, suite of 27 works,  
glue on solarised scratched photograph, 11 x 9 cm



*Threshold Series*, 2012, suite of 27 works,  
solarised scratched photograph, 9 x 12 cm



*Outside the Field of View VI*, 2014, graphite on acid-free paper, 49 x 49 cm. Photo: Sarker Protick

all images Courtesy the artist and Experimenter, Kolkata

From images it is truly difficult to determine what the work comprises, in physical terms. It's probably paper, most likely folded to create what looks like a modest relief. Almost certainly with graphite applied on top. The surface is often symmetrically divided into dark squares and triangles. Yet it is slightly reflective and shimmers shyly. The work appears to be delicate and the size relates to the human scale. Later I learn that my speculations are more or less correct.

It should come as no surprise that Ayesha Sultana's 2014 solo debut, at Kolkata's Experimenter gallery, was titled *Outside the Field of View*. The artist is interested in that which escapes plain sight but which nevertheless has a palpable presence. Sometimes she is also interested in things that in the meantime have disappeared. Her drawings explore the rich variety of greys that graphite offers, as well as the transience of the medium that quickly takes on a life of its own unless carefully sealed. Hence, drawing is more of an activity, a verb, than a noun, or an end result; moreover, for Sultana it includes cutting, folding and layering as well. These intensive workings on the paper create frictions and ruptures that are set in contrast to the geometric order of the surface.

Sultana's hometown, Dhaka, is a source of inspiration and even a direct reference in the work. It's as if she wants to absorb and assimilate the impermanence and precarity of—to choose one example—the ever-present shantytowns. The use of metal plates of various kinds in those zones is reflected in the work—literally, via the inclusion of metal

components. But more than that, such work, reliant on small pieces of fragile material, can be seen as a challenge to the dimensions of a city with over 15 million inhabitants, a buzzing street life and notorious traffic jams. Furthermore, there is a certain solemnity to Sultana's intimate work, which—strangely—reminds me of architect Louis Kahn's monumental and wondrous National Assembly Building of Bangladesh.

Another body of work is a series of appropriated colour photographs, which typically contain horizons and were mainly taken by her father on trips across the world. A mountain range, a desert, a riverbank, a forest, a cityscape seen from an airplane. Like the graphite drawings, none of them shows people. The images are placed outside and exposed to the weather: sunshine as well as rain. The results of this are stains and colour changes, but in addition the artist likes to scratch them, as if at once to highlight and damage them. Typically shown in clusters, the framed photographs are thus brought into the art context, once more demanding heightened perception from the viewers.

Sultana is a member of the Dhaka-based artist collective Britto Arts Trust, which recently curated a one-day exhibition in Old Dhaka,

*1 Mile<sup>2</sup> Dhaka*, dealing with diversity in the neighbourhood. Forty artists participated and Sultana's contribution was an installation on the walls of an old Hindu building. Meticulously filling existing cracks and fissures in the brick structure with gold-leaf sheets, she brought a sense of preciousness to the crumbling house.

Ayesha Sultana's multifaceted practice hinges on transformation—paper rendered preciously glossy and geometric beneath sharp folds and layers of graphite, slack velvet banners, cosseting interventions in decrepit buildings—as well as painting and sound. The Dhaka-based artist, born in Jessore, Bangladesh, won the 2014 Samdani Art Award and has recently had solo exhibitions in Kolkata and Rome.

Selected by Maria Lind, director of Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm, and an independent curator and writer.

Information moves socially. Power transfers via group dynamics. Relationships play out according to the rejection of, or acquiescence to, agreed social codes. At this moment I don't want to hear anything more about social networks or to be made any more aware of their presence. On the other hand, paying attention to the particular 'feel' of relationship dynamics, to the visceral, bodily impact of one person's behaviour on another or to power and energy being physically passed from hand to hand does seem appealing. Urgent, even.

Anne Imhof's ensemble performances take their cues from the coded behaviours and clandestine languages of cliques and clubs used by doormen and pickpockets, transposing personal and group endeavours into precise (and often achingly slow) movements. In the various iterations of Imhof's work *School of the Seven Bells*, for example, small metal rods are passed with learned grace between the hands of the performers, who are gathered either in a circle or in a row. As the rods knock against one another and the rings on the performers' fingers (another combination of lines and circles), they create a clinking soundtrack, and the choreographed gazes between individuals add tension to the proceedings as they change groupings. Named after a mythological underground academy for thieves, the work is a quasi translation of Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959), particularly those scenes in which we see a series of stolen items passed subtly

*Anne Imhof lives between Paris and Frankfurt, the latter being where she studied at the Städelschule, graduating in 2012. She follows her MOMA PS1 commission, DEAL (2015), with a solo show in New York at Recena Spaulings Fine Art and participation in group shows at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, and the Nouveau Festival at the Pompidou Centre, Paris.*

*Selected by Laura McLean-Ferris, contributing editor, ArtReview.*

between individuals after the initial lift, so that the location of the stolen object is lost and the responsibility for the crime diffused. Unlike the virtuosic lightness of Bresson's pickpockets, however, Imhof's actors convey a kind of seething aggression.

The artist's performances are often sound-tracked by a combination of recorded noise and music, together with incidental sounds and spoken word. For *Aqua Leo* (2013–), named after code words used by doormen at the Offenbach am Main nightclub Robert Johnson, the sound of energy drinks being opened and cigarettes being lit punctuates the performance, as donkeys and human performers move between spaces that confer the status of being 'in' or 'out'. In terms of spoken scripts the German artist (who also plays with a band, Beautiful Balance) employs *ars nova*, a choral style developed in the Middle Ages, to layer multiple phrases, creating a schizophrenic form of meaning. At the time of writing, *DEAL* (2015), Imhof's latest commission, is just about to open at MOMA PS1 in New York. It features interactions between performers seemingly compelled by a set of rules to dunk their hands in vats of buttermilk and to manage the release and containment of giant bunny rabbits. At a time when labour is screened away, information is held offsite and it is difficult to lay blame for events such as the global banking crisis at any individual door, Imhof stages visible forms of relational transaction, desire and dependency that nonetheless build to no climax.



*Aqua Leo, 1st of at least two, slide show, 2013.*  
Photo: Nadine Fraczkowski. Courtesy the artist and Deborah Schamoni, Munich.



*Untitled 1, 2010. Courtesy the artist*

I have known Ádám Kokesch for 20 years, as I was his teacher at the Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Budapest. In truth, however, I was more his supporter than his teacher, who provided him with the time and the trust required for developing himself and his work, and processing the influences that were significant to him.

Rather than being a seeker like other painting students, Ádám, almost from the beginning, has been working on his – still developing – programme. His works have always been characterised by impersonality and technical precision, striving for ‘clear’ communication. I remember one of his first pieces: a mattress made of transparent plastic and tufted with factory precision. He was unsatisfied with the work, as it had an – invisible – defect. He took his first visual motifs from the round, gridded figure of the TV monoscope with its solid colours. He has worked with a precise *hinterglas* technique (continuing to this day: he paints on glass or fibreglass plates from behind). The geometric order, the vibrant colours and the precise boundaries of visual elements brought to mind Concrete painting and the hexagon-shaped colour wheel of Goethe’s *Theory of Colours* (1810). I would have been content with this reference, had Ádám not used the terms *database* and *data gate*, taken from the language of computers. Later, however, it became clear that this was not a known category of painting, but an unfolding means of

communication similar to a language system of sorts, and based on a unique, unbridled, poetic logic. The paintings showed rosettelike motifs of various sizes with lines of force between them. Then the painting surfaces turned horizontal and became plotting boards, on which Ádám placed tiny buildings and sculptural forms.

The unusual form and installation of the painting surfaces prompt viewers to formulate various interpretations: in some instances, they are positioned knee-high as seats; in others, they are held by an articulated arm at the ceiling, or are placed on advertising pillars in the street, feigning to contain information. The painted *hinterglas* components of recent works are added, with ever more generous consistency, to the expanding arsenal of mass-produced objects collected from various areas of use. These explicitly aesthetic, peculiar object ensembles are valid in themselves: they are – as Ádám puts it – ‘entities’ that are a law unto themselves, flouting any attempt at interpretation. They are rendered significant by their safe execution and natural, good proportions, which simultaneously alienate the familiar and allude to another reality.

‘It is where the vantage point of Joseph Cornell, Imi Knoebel and Reinhard Mucha intersect that I feel most at home,’ states Ádám in an interview. His works, however, are fresh and autonomous; they cannot be linked to any known artform.

*Ádám Kokesch has had numerous solo and group shows in his home city of Budapest, including at Trafó in 2014. He was part of the 13th Istanbul Biennial (2013), curated by Fulya Erdemci, and has undertaken residencies in New York and in Nykarleby, Finland, as well as at Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw.*

*Selected by Dóra Maurer, artist, Budapest.*

Interviewed by Blouin Artinfo France on the occasion of the unveiling, in 2012, of *Bordel Monstre*, his monumental, sprawling installation made up of debris in Paris's Palais de Tokyo, Delhi-based artist Asim Waqif (who was born in Hyderabad) was asked to name 'the most indispensable item in your studio'. He gave the following answer: 'Knives and blades.'

I have a lot of different tools for each artwork idea.' As it so happens, I was fortunate enough to meet the artist in his studio in an improbably dusty backstreet of Tughlakabad, a suburb of the Indian capital (Waqif enjoys keeping a healthy distance from the artworld), where I was shown said collection of knives and blades – not part of the regular studio-visit routine, this was a somewhat frightening sight.

Known for his elaborate, crudely interactive site-specific instal-

*After training as an architect and working in film, Hyderabad-born Asim Waqif has evolved an art practice that engages with city structures, dereliction and precarity, inspired by and often built into the city of Delhi. His monumental – often trash-based – installations have recently been constructed at Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Nature Morte, Delhi; the Marrakech Biennale; and Dhaka Art Summit.*

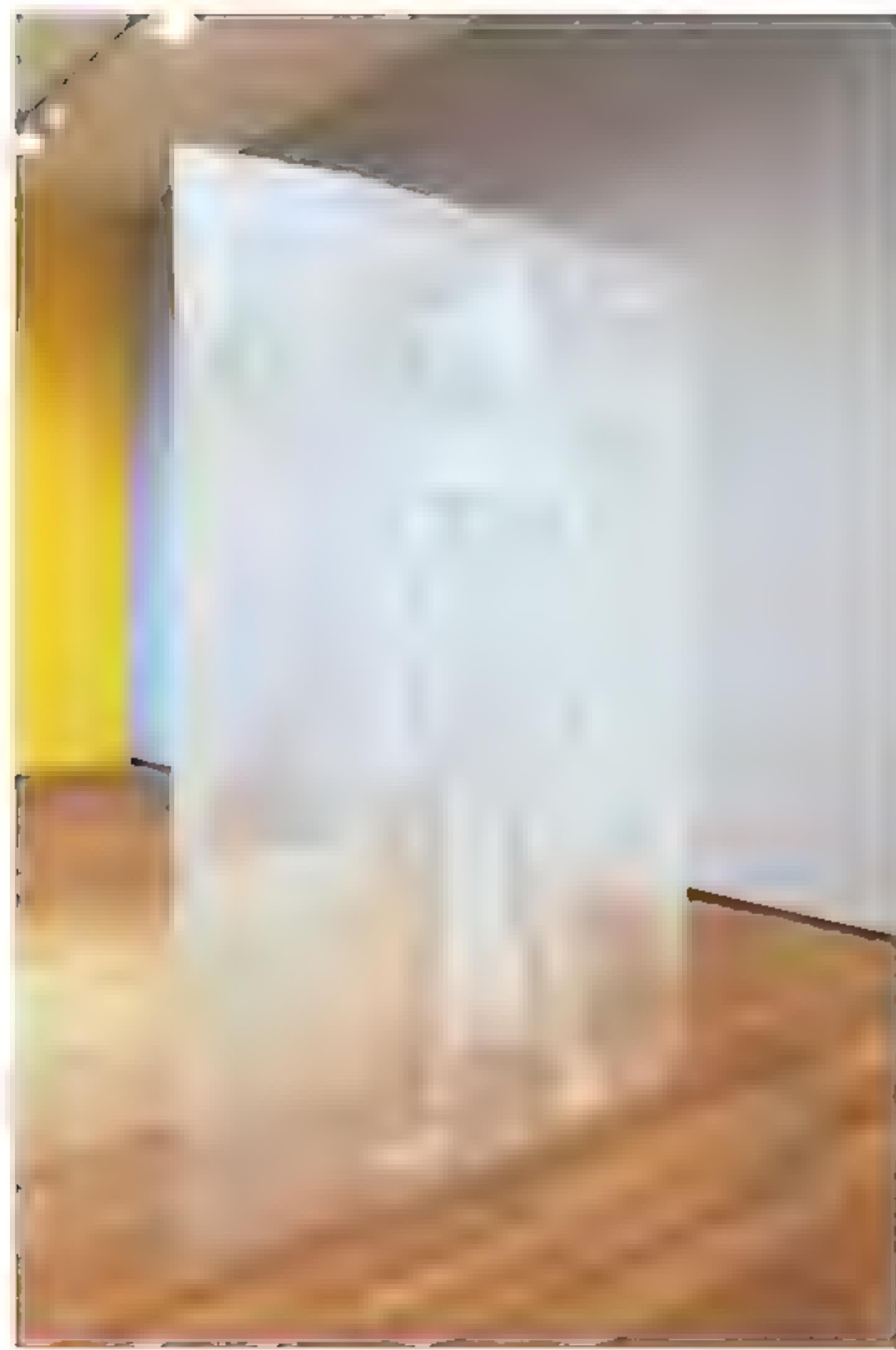
*Selected by Dieter Roelstraete, member of the curatorial team of Documenta 14, Kassel.*

lations that often involve labyrinthine weavings of bamboo, Waqif was originally trained as an architect, and the peculiar predicaments of South Asian urbanism clearly continue to shape much of his seemingly Luddite material thinking – questions concerning housing and provisional, precarious living, habitation and homelessness. Most significantly, however,

his signature recycling of various waste materials directly addresses the catastrophic ecological crises set off by the economic boom that has so thoroughly transformed the Indian built environment. Underneath the artist's disregard for artworld decorum ('the weirdest thing in most museums and galleries is that you're not allowed to touch most of the art') lies an all-the-more urgently felt moral core – here is an artist from whom a city, a country, a world can learn a thing or two.



*Bordel Monstre*, 2012 (installation view, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2012).  
Photo: Romain Meriaux Delbarre. Courtesy SAM Art Projects, Paris



*What is the moon?*, 2014 (installation view, Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, 2014).

crystal-clear polyurethane, 200 x 140 x 15 cm.

Courtesy the artist and Collection Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht

Allow me to introduce Rodrigo Hernández with an anecdote: walking down the street one day in Oaxaca City, he had us pause to admire the lettering on a sign in a store window in which the first part had been done by a professional painter but the second part, presumably added later, had been done by an amateur who sought to imitate the professional, but with winsomely wonky results. It was precisely that second part, and the inimitable uniqueness of each letter that composed it, that so charmed the artist.

For all its simplicity, this anecdote is incredibly telling about Hernández's interests and his approach to making art. An adept and lover of the handmade, the Mexican, currently Basel-based, is driven by a desire to reduce artmaking to its most fundamental, if primeval, components, which for him have a great deal to do with drawing, sculpture, space and the relation between the three (even if what he does also occasionally includes collage and painting). This reduction is not just limited to form, but also to content. When not asking basic questions like a true plasticien through the works themselves (eg, what is a drawing? A sculpture?), Hernández asks them literally, such as with the title of an artist book published on the occasion of his 2014 solo at the Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht, *What is the moon?* On a more formal level, the anonymous, primitivistic figures he

depicts, invariably portrayed singly in large, open spaces, in graphite, paint and three-dimensions, border on stick-figure quality, while his palette is dominated by mostly uninflected primary colours. To date his most complex material is probably polyurethane, deployed to create a two-dimensional, quasi-stick-figure sculpture – otherwise, his formal vocabulary consists of graphite, paper, rice paper, oil on wood, plaster, papier mâché and other basic art stuffs, and as such, upon first glance, would seem to be markedly out of step with the current moment.

However, despite all appearances, this work is not naive. In the richest and most expanded sense of the cliché, it is 'disarmingly simple', in that it seeks to disarm the viewer through the immediacy of the handmade, the elementary quality of what is portrayed as well as materials used to do so, and the wide open, highly articulated spatial configurations that characterise his installations. Indeed, deeply human, the world that Hernández's work portrays is an idealised world, blessedly devoid of the surfeit of information, maniacal hyperactivity and tempestuous conundrums of the twenty-first century.

Dreaming more than it seeks to reflect, it reflects through dreaming, as if its very lack indicated precisely what was missing. And it is this ability to dream about and reflect on the world in such refreshingly essential terms that makes this work so compelling.

*Presently in Basel on a residency, Rodrigo Hernández attended the Jan Van Eyck Academie in Maastricht and prior to that the Kunstakademie Karlsruhe. This year Hernández has solo shows at Kim? Riga, and Museo Universitario del Chopo, Mexico City, and will participate in the Bienal de las Fronteras, Mexico City.*

*Selected by Chris Sharp, contributing editor, ArtReview.*



Oscar Neustern, *The Plan (Press Kit)*, 1969–70. Courtesy Mario García Torres

In the same way that an idea need not be acted upon in order to exist, can an artist's practice also exist only as thought? While for some people the idea of making something is only the beginning of a longer story, for Oscar Neuestern it is the end. It is all there is. It is precisely what defines his practice. It is simply a search, a precise one, that will most probably never reach any end. Could this be the epitome of the future, the future artist?

I first learned about Neuestern when I read an article on his work in the September 1969 issue of *ArtNews*. It was written by Kiki Kundri and described the (then) short career of the artist. It intrigued me enormously from the start. The still young Neuestern (born 1948, USA) had quickly developed a practice concerned with the absolute, based on absence, in search of the nonact. In fact, his practice had started to be shaped by the condition from which he suffered. As Kundri described it, that condition took the form of some kind of amnesia that prevented the artist from remembering what had happened the day before; any research he undertook one day had to start over again the next. Neuestern's was a search that commenced every day afresh, with little remembrance of any leads that had been previously uncovered.

American Oscar Neuestern's entire artistic career is built on exploring the concept of absence. In 2008, his work was included in the group show *Out of Sight* at *Proyectos Monclova* (who also represent Mario García Torres) in Mexico City.

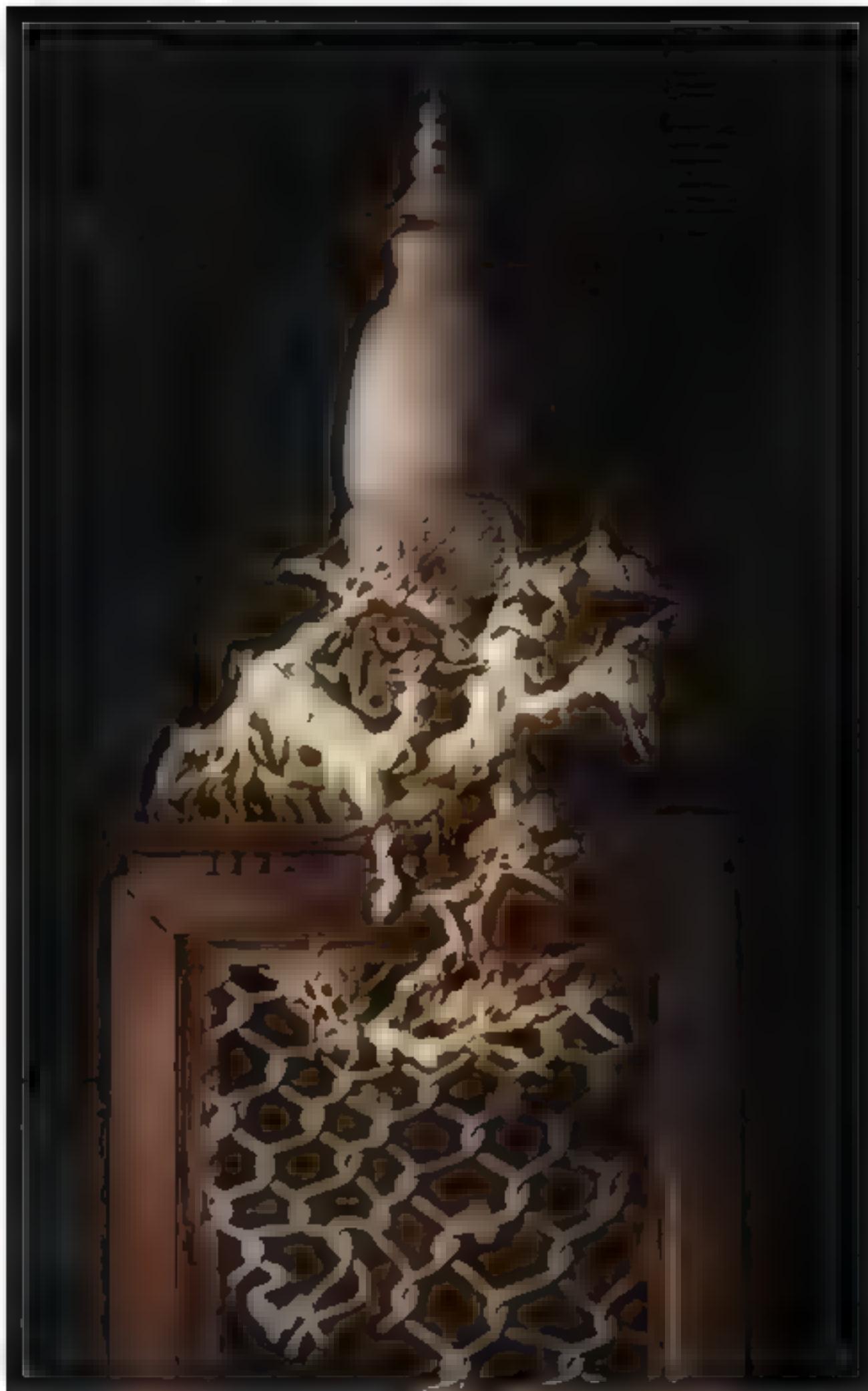
Selected by Mario García Torres, artist, Mexico City.

it than a concrete existence. How little can we do, and still create a thought?

Recently, I was able to hear the artist's voice in some fragments of what appears to be a conversation between Neuestern and an unidentified interviewer. In it, the artist talks about transparency in a somewhat poetic way. He defines the translucent as the only space in which to reach the absolute, the ultimate nonact. For him, any trace of action will render the story opaque, which would prevent him from advancing his investigation. But even if I trust what I heard... does it make it the most concrete proof of this artist's practice in existence? His voice seemed to fill the air with uncertainty as it obliterated itself. Might it be that it is precisely the doubt that surrounds the story that actually creates the potential for these ideas to be disseminated? That it is this that leads each of us ourselves to question our daily life and understanding of the future?



Mario García Torres, Photograph of a window pane; the only clear surface at the post office building in Salt Lake City, USA where Oscar Neuestern installed an exhibition in 1970 taken years after the fact but where I went to try and find some traces of his most probably forgotten gesture, 2008. Courtesy the artist



*Untitled*, from the *Dislocate* series, 2015, jackfruit wood, dimension variable.  
Courtesy the artist

Bùi Công Khanh is an artist deeply fascinated by social assumptions of cultural heritage. As one of the first local artists to gain an international reputation during the 1990s, with his performances questioning restrictions of individual expression in communist Vietnam, Bùi's multifarious practice has since embraced painting, sculpture, installation, video and drawing, with successful showcases across the Southeast Asian region and beyond.

Born in Da Nang, a coastal city dominated by American GIS during the Vietnam War, and having grown up in Hoi An, a nearby historic trading port that was a bustling immigrant town for Chinese and Japanese merchants during the eighteenth century, Bùi often uses his art to reflect the complex interwoven history of Vietnam.

This is evidenced, for example, in his questioning of how authenticity is vouched for when styles, methods and markets merge – as in his series of ceramic vases recalling the largesse of dynastic China, depicting popular romanticised river landscapes with Buddhist pagodas tethered via chaotic electrical wires that are typically found across Vietnam. His desire to document the perspective of the disadvantaged is found in his hand-drawn and photographic portraiture, where Ho Chi Minh City's rapid urban renewal is forcing families from their homes, their plight unrecorded in state archives kept under tight government control. His

*Bùi Công Khanh is a poetically provocative artist, well respected by his community, whose art continues to grow with depth afforded by historical research, a marriage of the plastic arts with conceptual method not taught within the educational system of Vietnam. He currently lives and works between Ho Chi Minh City and Hoi An.*

*Selected by Zoe Butt, executive director and curator of San Art, Ho Chi Minh City.*

rural community engagements, often involving the sharing of a meal, reveal his love of the chef as a metaphorical spirit medium. Here the noodles of 'Cau Lau' (a recipe particular to Hoi An) combine the spice of China with French distilled broth using the aromatic ingredients of Vietnam, providing possible redemption to the endurance of foreign control. These are just a few examples of how Bùi's art examines Vietnam's resilient yet destructive dance between colonial occupation, political independence and economic progress.

More recently he has been digging further into the social sensitivities surrounding his Chinese/Vietnamese ancestry via the carving of intricate sculptures made of jackfruit wood – a material traditionally used to fabricate Vietnamese fishing boats, a vessel typically dotting the South China Sea. Today however such maritime regions are military zones increasingly controlled by the ironclad machinery of global trade in defence of regional territorial disputes. In this forthcoming body of work Bùi contrasts military strategy with religious structures of worship in response to the growing tension between China and

Vietnam surrounding the ownership of the Spratly Islands. Cannons are placed within the windows of a tiered pagoda, while a bonsai plant threatens to engulf its existence. Questions of control and ethnicity, of who has power over what is natural, manmade or celestial, are thrown into question.

Diaphanous colour, roughly handled, finds sensuous body and mystic force in the drawings, ceramics, paintings and words of Rachelle Sawatsky, Canadian by birth but denizen of Los Angeles by election. Huge sheets of paper get battered with bleach and sunlight, the flow of water and the unstruck force of colour puddling with gravity. The edges can tatter from their travails, but their texture is all the more beautiful for its distress. 'When I think about painting, I think about liquidity,' Sawatsky has said. 'I'm more interested in mould and degradation than elegance or purity.' The ravages of floods, the hot fluids of sultry couplings, the messiness of bodies and material and spirit commingling, the slippery lust even makes the drawings blush pastel, but that whisper of modesty hardly halts the odd turns and sudden demands.

*Born in British Columbia, Rachelle Sawatsky lives and works in Los Angeles. Sawatsky's varied output includes artist books, paintings, ceramics and works incorporating found materials, and has been the subject of recent solo shows at both the Finley and Harmony Murphy galleries in LA, and the Or Gallery in Berlin.*

*Selected by Andrew Berardini, writer, Los Angeles.*

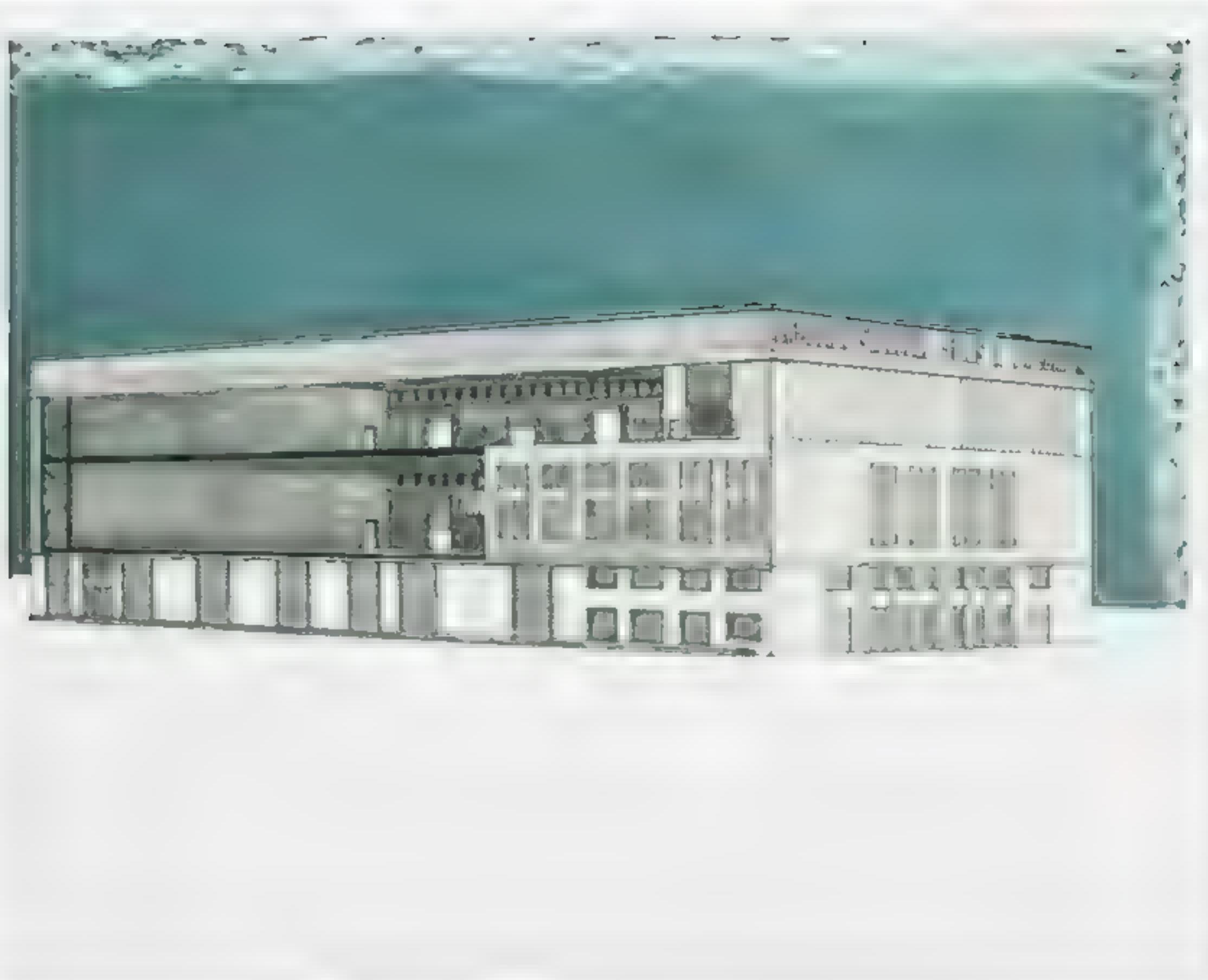
When she fires ceramics, they slink and crack up white walls, their emanations of colour like the white cube caught a few glassy, chromatic love bumps. When she writes, her words have the same simple pulsing, searching energy, the same robust physicality and expansive soul. Her words

struggle to plumb the mysteries in all their soft, wet darkness but remain corporeal, sunkissed and colourful, sometimes self-conscious but more often brave. In an essay for fellow artist Tiziana La Melia, Sawatsky describes the difficulty of putting it all into words:

*It is abstract; it is figurative. It doesn't really matter if you do one or the other at any one time. You just have to trust that there is a relationship between the two; you think it is related to risk. You trust beauty. Few people have written about it because few people have even seen it. Writing about it is a practice of experimental ethnography.*



*Untitled*, 2014, watercolour on unglazed ceramic, 24 x 18 x 8 cm.  
Courtesy the artist



*Lucifero – project #02, 2015, project for an environmental installation,  
oil, ink and pencil on paper, 36 x 43 cm*

Gian Maria Tosatti is an artist one hears more than sees. His level of activity and energy is such that he rarely stands still, yet wherever he goes he strongly vocalises his thoughts on subjects ranging from activism, to regional and local politics, to religion. Thankfully, these thoughts are erudite and relevant to the worldwide contemporary social discourse. Indeed, within an artworld increasingly given over to pithy irony, 'crapstraction', 'flipping' and the cult of celebrity, it is refreshing to encounter someone who takes things quite as seriously as Tosatti does. *My Dreams They'll Never Surrender* (2014), a permanent installation situated in the heavily fortified Castel Sant'Elmo, a Neopolitan castle that was for centuries used as a prison and which rises above the entire city, features a cornfield that must be constantly replenished by the people of Naples. The work is dedicated to those political prisoners – such as Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi – who have found the strength to change the world from behind bars.

*My Dreams They'll Never Surrender* was realised alongside his ongoing project *Sette Stagione dello Spirito* (*Seven Seasons of the Spirit*, 2013–), which will comprise seven shows in total by its end. The third of these shows, *Lucifero* – dedicated to Lucifer – opens at the port of Naples in March and will coincide with the final months of the project – *The Kingdoms of Hunger* – in Lampedusa, the forlorn Italian island whose hapless residents do their best to welcome incoming waves of immigrants arriving by boat; emaciated, desperate and

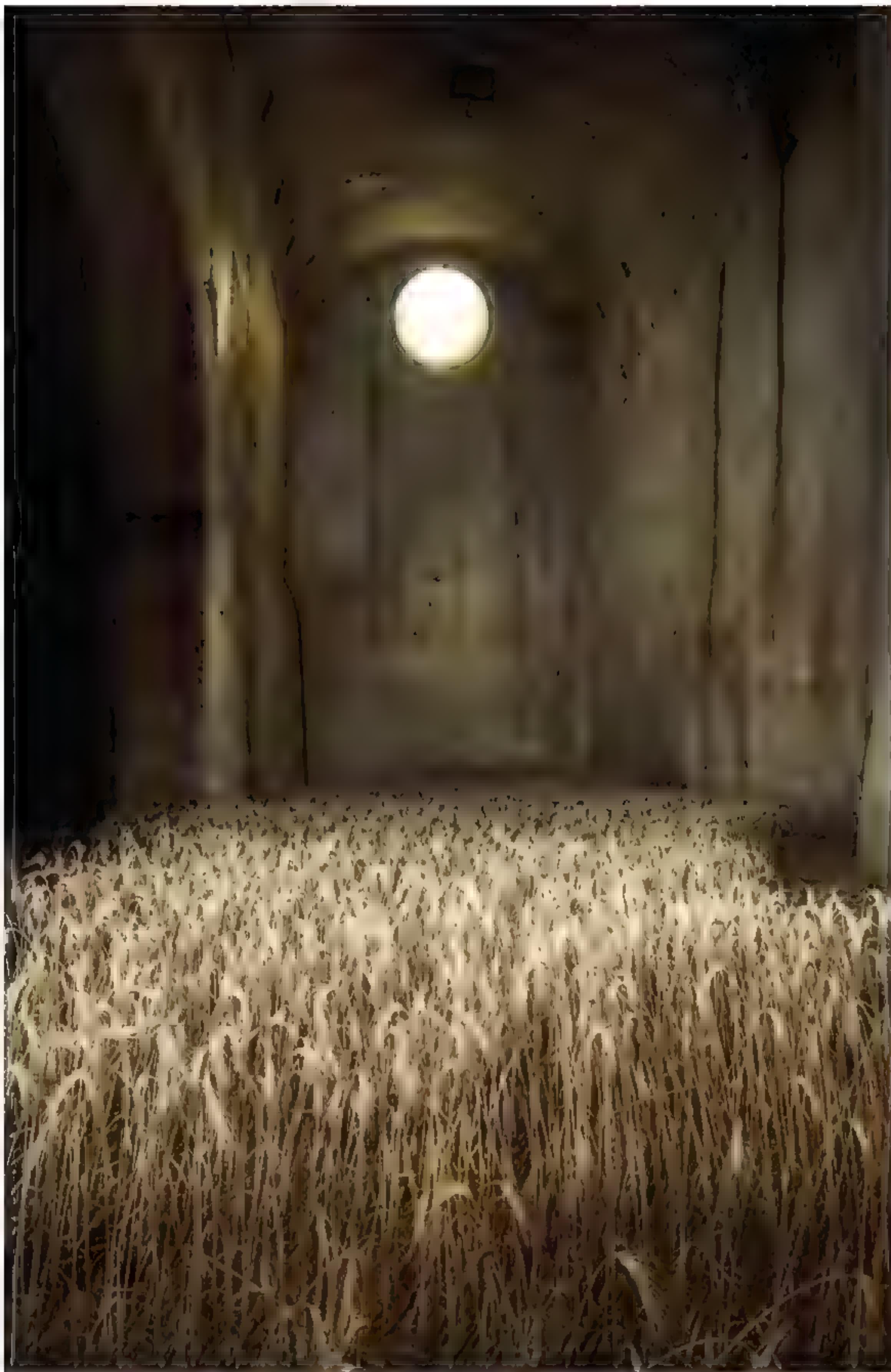
sometimes dead. The work, begun during the 2013 Mediterranean Biennale in Acona, will take the form of a sacrarium, developed in consultation with the local community, in which Lampedusa's traumatised inhabitants, who find themselves filling the gap left by inadequate government provision but often seek psychologically to distance themselves from the ongoing tragedy off their shores, will be able to pray and meditate, and hopefully find some small consolation amid one of the great humanitarian crises of our times.

Indeed, both the dedication of his approach and the modality in which he works, generally relying on the use of raw readymade materials, make Tosatti appear like a character out of time: a political orator plucked from the drawing rooms of nineteenth-century Europe and schooled in conceptualism before being left in Naples – where he has been in long-term residence with Fondazione Morra since 2013 – to ponder life in twenty-first-century Italy. It is this longed-for seriousness – in an age sadly given over to banal and fleeting reflections – that has seen Tosatti collecting accolades over the last year while signing to Galleria Lia Rumma. The honourable

*Since postgraduate research into the interplay between art and architecture, one-time newspaper editor Gian Maria Tosatti has produced work on a large scale, notably a series of projects that spread through the spaces of cities over a period of years. This son of Rome currently finds himself in Naples working on his wide-ranging Sette Stagione dello Spirito during a two-year residency at Fondazione Morra.*

*Selected by Mike Watson, theorist and critic, Rome.*

mention he received from the international jury of the Premio Furla (Italy's most prestigious prize for young artists) will result in a residence in the studio of Vanessa Beecroft in 2016. In the coming years Tosatti is as unlikely to slow down as the world's problems are likely to be resolved.



*My Dreams, They'll Never Surrender*, 2014,  
environmental installation, wheat and metal, 1,000 sq/m  
all images Courtesy Galleria Lia Rumma, Milan & Naples

It's a famous legend that 'Eskimos' have tens if not hundreds of words to designate different types of snow. *Aput* is the word for snow in general. Snow in the form of salt particles is *pukak*. Light snow, *akkilok-ipok*. Soft, deep snow, *mauja*. Slushy snow, *mangokpok*. Bits of snow moving atop water, *sikut iqimaniri*. Wet snow falling from the sky, *imalik*. A patch of mountain snow, *aputitaq*. Wet snow on top of ice, *putsinniq*. Hard snow, *mangiggal*. Drifting snow, *sullarniq*.

This intellectual fable has a wide circulation, its emotional didacticism allowing the telling of a story: in the icy and desolate antipodes, a group of humans are enjoying language's richness. Nevertheless, evidence has shown that the population known as the Eskimos is as deep as it is wide, that many of these terms are likely morphological derivations from a single root, that specific words might number as many as a dozen, but not tens and certainly not hundreds, and that one doesn't have to go far to find examples of the language going over the same ground again and again.

The work of Delcy Morelos has seemingly inhabited every red to have emerged since the beginning of painting, and as in the infinite variations of white on white in the mythical vocabulary of the Eskimos, it is indeed possible to find in the work of this artist exhaustive variations of colour and paint.

What can we say when we stand before a painting? That we are looking at pigments spread across a surface – or to put it in technical terms, oil or acrylic on canvas. Anything else? Morelos's works are an

Born in Tierra Alta, Colombia, Delcy Morelos studied at the Escuela Superior de Bellas Artes de Cartagena. Since 1990 she has shown regularly in her hometown of Bogotá, most recently the series *Agua salada organizada* (2007–14), a body of work equalling the structure and stuff of the human body and the formation of paintings, at Alonso Garcés Galería.

Selected by Lucas Ospina, artist and professor at the Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá

opportunity to experiment with the limits of these kinds of responses. It is enough to look without inventing new terms or critical (and cryptic) phrases that serve to name each of Morelos's gestures. One must leave oneself to be enveloped in the atmosphere of her insistence, to look at the form and

accept that, beyond the mythologies of words, the power of the colour speaks for itself.

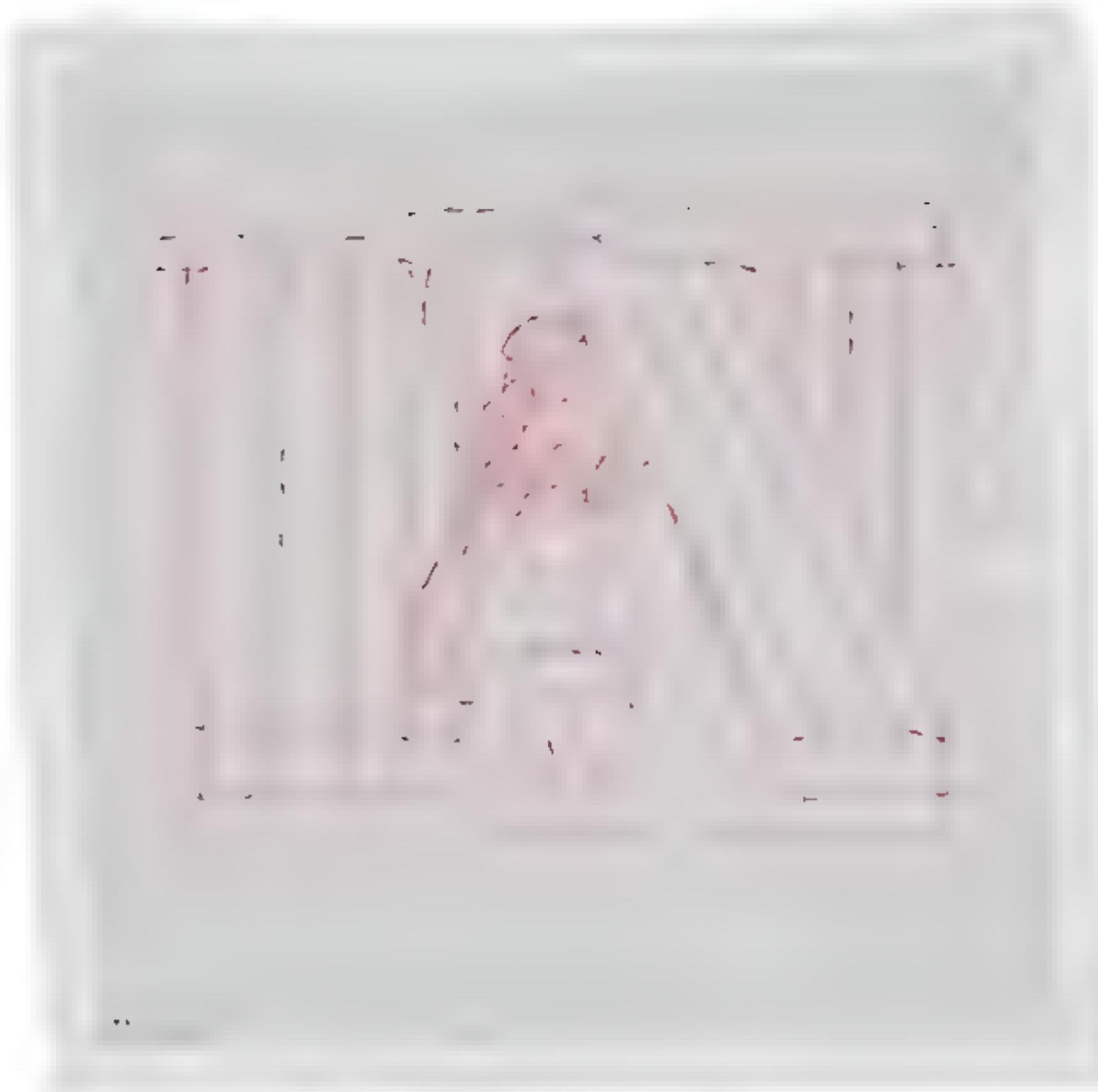
Morelos has been exhibiting consistently since 1997, and her shows respond forcefully to the demands of the spaces in which they are mounted. Her emblematic series *Color que soy* (The Colour I Am, 1999–2002) was shown in its entirety, 60 paintings of 3 × 1.5 m, for the first time at the Museo de Arte de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia, in Bogotá, in 2002. Her works run from painting solid geometric blocks in different skin tones, to large-format industrial canvases, to sculptural structures with cords softened and bathed in red encaustic, penetrable paintings, textures, organic labyrinths.

During the mid-1990s, in one of the galleries where Morelos exhibited for the first time, the gallerists suggested that she leave out of her biography the name of the small town where she was born and raised; it seems that at that time exoticism was not fashionable. Now, when every artist uses supposed marginality to come up with a history that makes him or her interesting on paper, Morelos has elegantly avoided this path. Her work is poor in words, rich in images.

Translated from the Spanish by David Terrien



*Adentro (Inside)*, 2007, 9 × 3 × 3 m, cotton thread, wood and acrylic paint.  
Photo: Esteban Escobar. Courtesy the artist



*Covering Sarah* (detail), 2009–10, cloth, thread, triptych, each: 46 × 46 cm.  
Photo: Franko Khoury. Courtesy National Museum of African Art,  
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

I came across Senzeni Marasela's work during one of those web-surfing sessions that takes you randomly from one page to the next. I was intrigued by the intensity and depth of scope of her work. I was all the more surprised that up to then I had neither been exposed to her practice nor had I ever heard anyone talk about her.

Born in Thokoza, South Africa, Marasela studied at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, where she obtained a BA Fine Arts degree in 1998. In 2003 she started a project titled *Theodorah comes to Johannesburg*, a durational performance based on her mother Theodorah's stories about travels from the rural area of Mvenyane to Johannesburg, a journey of 11 hours. Like many young black women in the city, her mother was traumatised by events that took place in apartheid South Africa during the 1960s. Many black women returned to live in the countryside and many more were forced to undertake journeys into strangeness. Marasela wore a yellow dress that her mother gave her, taking on Theodorah as an alter ego. The artist has always felt that Theodorah's story was representative of that of many black women in South Africa. The emblematic yellow dress has been translated into drawings, prints and thread works, always with the figure's back to the audience. The story of Theodorah never left Marasela's work and has at times been combined with that of Sarah Baartman (who was 'exhibited' around nineteenth-century Europe as the 'Hottentot Venus') and of the artist herself.

In 2013, Theodorah took another journey, for the photographic series *Ijeremani Lam*. Making reference to Njabulo Ndebele's novel

*The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2003), Theodorah is pictured alone in Johannesburg looking for her husband, Gebane Mthetyane. All the women in Ndebele's book are left by their husbands under various circumstances – the apartheid migration system frequently left black women alone and the black family disintegrated – and these women are forced to embark on a period of purgatory, waiting for the reunion with their families.

Marasela is interested in the multiplicity contained within the experience of waiting: in the pathologies of women who are either forced to wait or choose to wait. Ndebele's novel, which oscillates between fiction and documentary, clearly states this as we peruse the lives of his female characters. In the angst of their wait they begin an imaginary conversation with Winnie Mandela. The latter waited publicly for Nelson Mandela for 27 years and subjected herself to much scrutiny and the dissection of her own privacy. There is a perceptible haunting ache that runs through *Ijeremani Lam* that is, nevertheless, difficult to describe. What fascinates me in Marasela's work is that it addresses and carries out, by way of reenactments, a characteristic feature of contemporary life in Africa: waiting. Perhaps a waiting such as is portrayed in Abderrahmane Sissako's drama *Waiting for*

*Happiness* (2002), in which the main character has been away from home for so long – waiting somewhere in the desert to migrate to Europe – that he doesn't even remember his local language. Marasela adds complexity to the act of waiting and translates it into an affecting visual language charged with political and historical gravity.

Senzeni Marasela's work – in media including embroidery, print and video as well as performance – has been widely exhibited in South Africa, Europe and the US. The Boksburg-based artist, who is inspired by literary as well as family-historical themes, is the recipient of the 2002 Thami Mnyele Scholarship, the 2002 Upstream Award and the 2008 Ampersand Foundation Fellowship.

Selected by Koyo Kouoh,  
artistic director of RAW Material Company, Dakar



*both images Rainbow, 2013,  
single-channel video, 3 min 34 sec, edition of 6*



From *No.4 Pingyuanli to No.4 Tianqiaobeili*, 2007, video, 7 min 54 sec.

all images Courtesy Beijing Commune, Beijing

On 13 March 1982, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China made family planning a basic national policy. I label this 'One-child Year One.' Ma Qusha was born 10 days later at the Maternal and Child Health Hospital of Xuanwu District, Beijing (No.4 Pingyuanli). Twenty-three years later, she would start making auto-biographical videos.

In 2007 she made *From No.4 Pingyuanli to No.4 Tianqiaobeili* (2007). I was the first person to view the work. From that point on, I considered it to be an embodiment and portrait of the one-child generation. Like the razor blade in her mouth, it grazes the 'tongue of the times', stimulating viewers in a subtle, continuous, difficult, faint yet strong manner, revealing scars slowly, like developing prints. That thin 'blade' and supple 'tongue' are like Ma's two brushes, dripping with fresh blood, illness and pain, cruelty, love and the warm confrontation within. These are the anxieties, difficulties, loneliness and resentment of only children. But these are deeply entwined with and cannot be extricated from love and hate. Rather, they are relayed with the informal and unhurried ease of storytelling. She is often able to convey complicated, nuanced life experiences with deeply affecting yet simple and concise visual language.

As a member of the first 'one-child generation', Ma expressed an artistic 'sensitivity' from a young age, evident in *Self-portrait Series* (1990–2000). Perhaps it is due to growing up in a one-child era, but everyone seems to be an only child, from playmates and classmates to adulthood friends. Combined with excessive doting, people of this generation seem to have adopted a more 'perceptive' radar.

Ma's works nearly always convey a subtle scepticism: multimedia, but imbued with a certain 'soulfulness'. Regardless of whether the work is video, photography, installation, performance, event, painting, sculpture or any other media, there is always a

'self-constructed mirror' – the hidden mirror in self-portraits, the lens in various videos or even a window within a painting. Her works contain 'knives': a razorblade in the mouth (*From No.4 Pingyuanli...*), ice skates on concrete (*All My Sharpness Comes from Your Hardness*, 2011), emotional daggers (*Us*, 2010). Her works contain 'roads': the road of growing up (*From No.4 Pingyuanli...*), the road of temptation (*Token*, 2011), the road of death (*Star*, 2013); all roads come from the heart, with no endpoint. Her works contain 'light': the memory of filtered rays of sunshine, covering every piece of furniture in light spots, the pattern of which she turns into a print (*Fog*, 2011), the light ceremony at Tiananmen Square just before dusk (*Twilight Is the Ashes of Dust*, 2011), the mosquitoes of summer nights that fly to starry deaths, bodies exploding in a weak flame against electric zappers (*Star*, 2013). Regardless of intensity, they all burn from the heart.

Currently, China is the only country that enforces a one-child policy. However, 2013 marked the implementation of the second child policy (married couples in which either parent is an only child may also have a second baby). Ma, who became a mother that same year, remains conflicted about whether to take advantage of the reform. She doesn't wish her lonesome fate onto her child, but whether she has the ability to support a second child remains in question. Within the next decade or two, only-children will come into power, forming the backbone of the country. This 'singular generation', unique in the world, is full of unknowns. How will all the repressed feelings and emotions manifest themselves when combined with power? I do not dare imagine.

But I believe Ma will create more 'one-child generation portraits'. She is like a sharp feather, tickling while pricking; within every caress, an ache.

*When seven-year-old Ma Qusha's parents decided that their daughter would be an artist and enrolled her in drawing classes, it is unlikely they imagined that 22 years later that her first teacher – Song Dong – would present her debut institutional show in her home town of Beijing, Address, at Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art in 2011.*

*Selected by Song Dong, artist, Beijing.*

*Translated from the Chinese by Philana Woo*

I only recently met Kathryn Elkin and had the chance to familiarise myself with her body of work. Kathryn started talking about her interests and showcased her recent work *Mutatis Mutandis* (2014). The video focuses on a still life on a dark tabletop placed against a yellow backdrop. The most striking component of this is a bloody liver in a crystal dish; a wooden baton stands behind it, while the rest of the tabletop is occupied by a glass of red wine, a half-filled milk bottle and a red-and-white tea towel on a plate.

The aesthetics of the film reminded me of the Belgian-born poet, writer and painter Henri Michaux's short stories: the abstract, inexplicable state of affairs as an anonymous hand moves the piece of liver or pours the milk, invigorating the listener's senses, while a voiceover informs you of a fable that was once told to the artist by her mother. It describes a liver becoming animated if left with a glass bottle of milk in the fridge overnight. Kathryn translates the story with jump cuts, while discrepancies between visual representation and spoken pronunciation introduce word plays and free associations, appropriating the fable. *Mutatis Mutandis* is a Latin phrase

*Born in Belfast, now based in Glasgow, Kathryn Elkin focuses on writing, video and performance work. As well as participating in the Artists' Moving Image project with BBC Scotland, her work has been shown as part of the Collective Gallery Edinburgh's satellite programme and is currently included in Till the Stars Turn Cold at Glasgow Sculpture Studios to 14 March.*

*Selected by Fatos Üstek,  
independent curator and writer, London.*

meaning 'the things being changed which need to be changed'. The necessary change (in the title) is brought alive through the image and the voiceover that transcribes and translates the movement captured as speech.

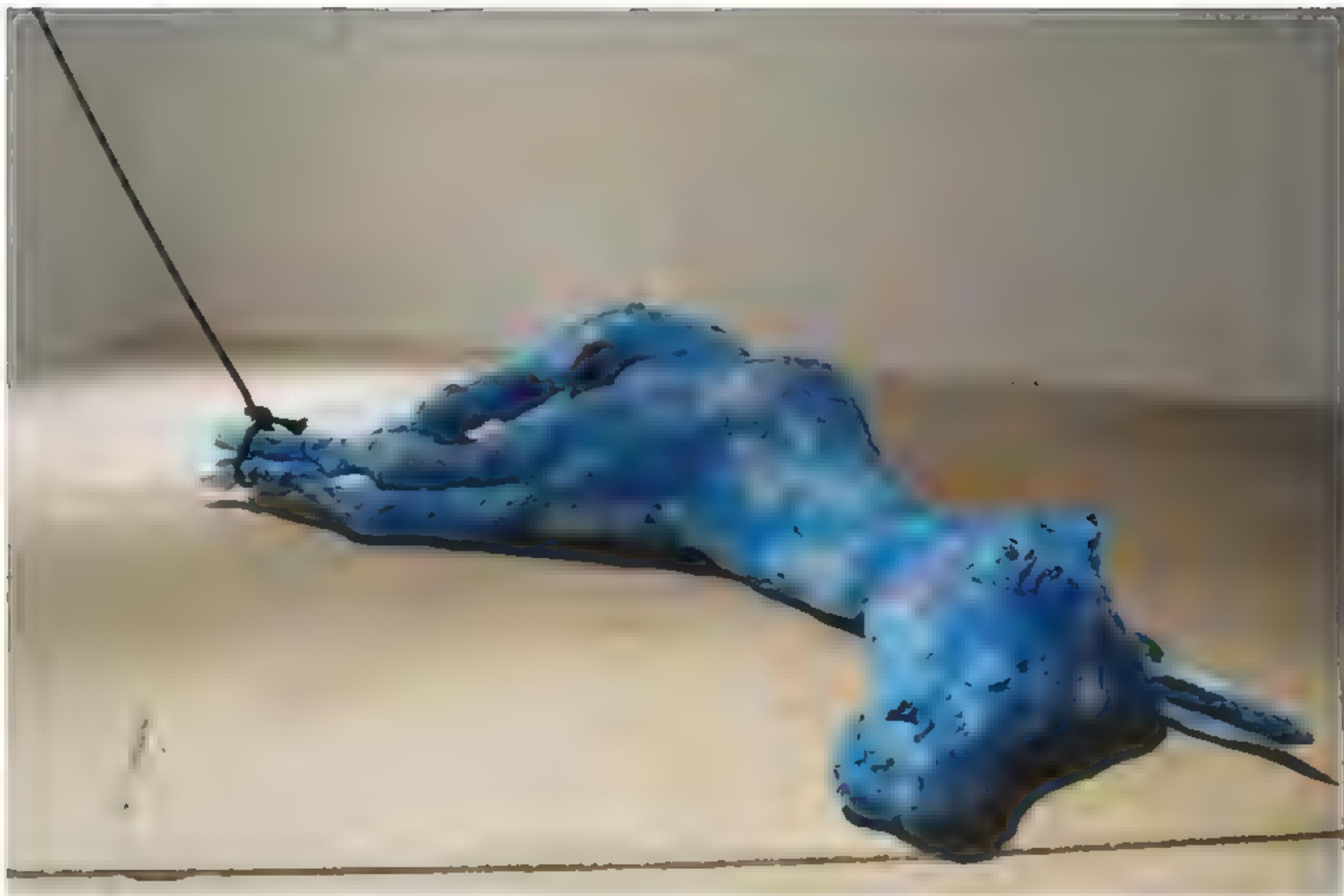
In the follow-up to our conversation, Kathryn brought forward her recent commission *Michael's Theme* (2014). This videowork

makes use of previously unbroadcast fragments from the opening and closing of several episodes in the first two series of *Parkinson*, a talkshow programme from the 1970s. Elkin produced the work as part of the Artists and Archives: Artists' Moving Image at the BBC residency programme that offered unprecedented access to the corporation's facilities and archives. The artwork is not only a collage of cutouts (from the recordings of *Parkinson*) but also a composition of Elkin's improvisations and interventions within the 'making of' the programme.

These two works for me are hints at Elkin's extensive body of work that manifests itself as performance, video and writing. What astonishes me the most are her genuine engagement, the aesthetics of her production and her irregular artistic conduct.



Poster for *Mutatis Mutandis*, 2014. Courtesy the artist



*Jerusalem Donkey*, 2007, papier mâché, paint, rope, approx 213 x 152 x 91 cm.  
Courtesy the artist

Mia Feuer is a young Canadian artist currently based in Washington, DC, unknown to me except through her work. In the DC metropolitan area Feuer is probably best known for her proposed public sculpture *Antediluvian*, which would have depicted a petrol station partially submerged in the Anacostia River. The project was cancelled in 2014, following objections from a civic group devoted to improving the image of that notoriously filthy stream.

The irony here is that the petrol station is not typical of Feuer's style. Her most accomplished pieces to date are large and colourful sculptures perfectly sized for gallery spaces. Feuer makes use of timber, Styrofoam, aircraft cable, shredded tires and rubbish from the Arctic—not to mention the edgy addition of tar and feathers, along with donkeys *en papier-mâché*. Unlike many artworks that employ found materials, Feuer successfully integrates these substances into works with a compelling formal integrity. The late J.G. Ballard once claimed that whereas artists used to produce fictions, we are now so surrounded by various fictions that henceforth the artist's job is to produce reality. In this spirit, Feuer's work gives one the sense of entering some sort of coherent, freestanding reality.

One of my favourite pieces by Feuer is the 2013 *Sled*, which transcends its exotic,

politically charged components ('petroleum trash found in the arctic sea and on the shores of arctic fjords') to become a golden treasure fit for an anthropology museum. An earlier work that strikes a similar note is 2007's *Bil'in Onion*: a human-size onion shape equipped with a 'found ventilation system' and emitting sounds from the gassing of a Palestinian village. Here once more, a work that was spurred by concrete political events manages to avoid preachy messaging. The onion is affably charismatic despite its regrettable origins. From the same year and the same part of the world, *Jerusalem Donkey* gives us a blue animal of that species, evidently dead, with a black cord tied around all four legs as when a traitor is dragged to death behind a car. In 2008 Feuer upped the ante with a work entitled *Barricade*, in which 50 or so Jerusalem donkeys are piled up to prevent our access to a doorway.

Perhaps the greatest appeal of Feuer's work is its complete lack of cynicism, even in those cases where it is inspired by tear gas, polluted oceans or other dangerous scenarios. The artist's biography indicates someone who has often been in contact with deep human suffering, yet the resulting art is not shrill or moralistic. Instead, one gets the sense of a balanced observer whose first reaction to disaster is transfiguration rather than the teaching of prosaic lessons.

Mia Feuer was born in Winnipeg, Canada, and now lives in Washington, DC: a suitable base for an artist whose sculptures grapple with geopolitical and environmental issues. An Unkindness, Feuer's 2013 solo outing at DC's Corcoran Gallery, deployed petrochemical byproducts and related industrial debris in works that were by turns furiously agglomerative and slick as ice.

Graham Harman is Distinguished University Professor at the American University in Cairo.



*Mc-Man-White/I-Man-White*, 2014, silkscreen print on silver gelatin print



*Full Service—Savages Against Whites*, 2012–14, video

Christopher Columbus, Buffalo Bill and Bartolomeu Dias are just a few of the names that take centre stage in the nonlinear narratives of Cyril Lachauer's work. In his art, a history – which as the colonised often say was 'planted on sandy soils and watered with blood' – is dissected, to reveal a past coloured by various shades of domination. In his printworks, sculptural installations and videos, Lachauer meticulously peels off these layers of history. In a recent group exhibition, *Wir Sind Alle Berliner*, curated by Simon Njami for SAVVY Contemporary (the Berlin-based art space that I coordinate), Lachauer presented, among other works, his video *Three Things* (2014), comprising found footage filmed in Thomas Edison's Black Maria studios in 1894 and featuring the Native Americans cast in the touring show Buffalo Bill's Wild West. With the original title *Sioux Ghost Dance*, the nineteenth-century film claimed to show a 'real' ritual dance. Buffalo Bill, who took 'his' Native

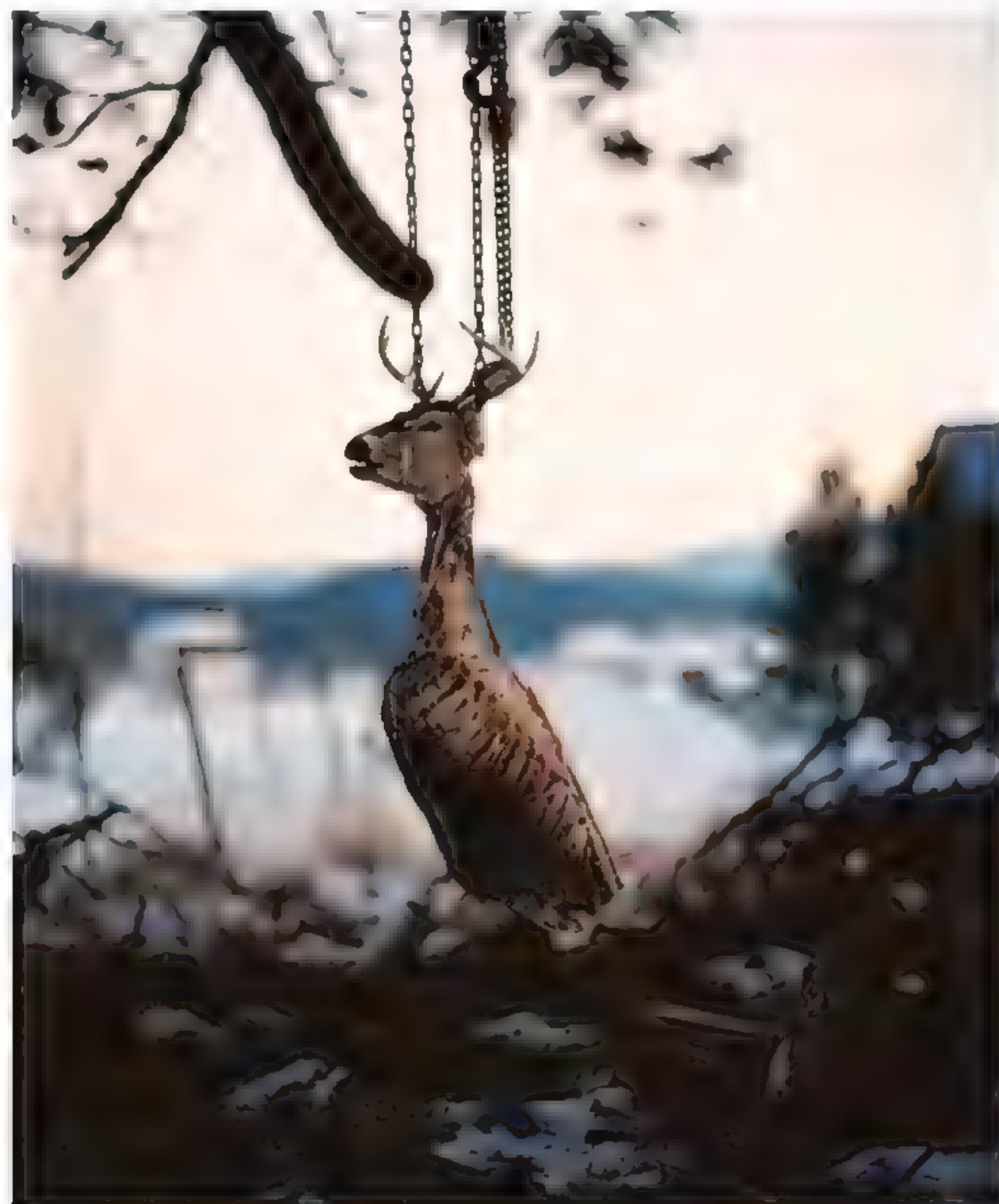
*Born in Rosenheim, now living in Berlin and Los Angeles, and currently doing a PhD in Ethnology, Lachauer is a modern landscape artist. For him, landscape goes beyond the physical to also encompass culture, and all that makes a space a space, with its history, spirituality and politics.*

*Selected by Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, independent curator and biotechnologist, Berlin.*

Americans on tour in America and Europe, was especially famous for staging episodes from the frontier and Indian Wars, where he himself stood as 'hero', while the Native Americans died a thousand deaths onstage. Which, arguably, is similar to how history is constructed generally. The soundscape for

*Three Things* – with its remarkable refrain, "White sugar, white bread, white people: put holes in your head" – was recorded by Lachauer on a field trip to California.

His first solo museum exhibition, *RICOCHET #9*, currently running at the Villa Stuck in Munich, centres on the multimedia project *Full Service* (2014). Consisting of, variously, film, video, photography and soundworks, it thematises the revival of the ritual of the Native American 'messiah' Wovoka – the Ghost Dance – the reawakening of Native American resistance movements, as well as gambling, prostitution and dreams and nightmares in Las Vegas.



*Full Service – From Walker River to Wounded Knee, 2012–14, C-print*

*all images Courtesy the artist and Thomas Fischer Gallery, Berlin*

Yan Xing's career in art began with *DADDY Project* (2011), a performance that took place in a small gallery located in suburban Beijing. There he stood, facing a brick wall, giving an autobiographical speech about his fatherless childhood while a camera recorded him from behind for a simultaneous broadcast on a nearby monitor. The one-hour narrative touched many people, but I have never really appreciated too much psychological interpretation or emotional resonance in art criticism. However, to me the work is interesting because it makes me laugh, and it offers some clues to the direction of the young artist's future works.

After *DADDY Project*, Yan created some more works using a performative strategy and an autobiographical narrative, while, as an addicted social-media user, he was continuously posting accounts of his semitruie, semifictional romance on Weibo (the Chinese Twitter), which made him what Gilbert & George might call a 'living sculpture'. *The Sex Comedy* (2013) and *The Sweet Movie* (2013), works created for the finalists' exhibition of the Future Generation Art Prize at the Pinchuk Art Centre, Kiev (and in the collateral event at Venice), showed that his use of a performative strategy (described by writer Raphael Gygax as '*tableaux vivants*') had finally matured. He has since come to be seen as 'the hottest emerging gay artist in China', but even then he was no longer satisfied with the digestion and exposure of his family history and personal life. As a matter of fact, Yan's artistic practice has always really been the product of a talented artist's history of studying.

Edward Hopper, Richard Hamilton, Robert Mapplethorpe, artist and friend Duan Jianyu, the propaganda film *Lenin in 1918* (1939), film

*Yan Xing lives between Beijing and Los Angeles. His videos, performances and installations have been shown by Galerie Urs Meile in Lucerne, and the Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester, and in 2012 at the 7th Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale. In 2015 he has solo exhibitions at Galerie Urs Meile in Beijing and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam*

*Selected by Aimee Lin, editor, ArtReview Asia.*

directors Pier Paolo Pasolini and Catherine Breillat – Yan Xing selects all that fascinates him as his 'materials'. Each of his works is based on the decomposition, analysis and recombination of one of those materials. By interpreting and evolving existing art elements into his personal and current context, he has developed a methodology and created his art. His 2013 solo exhibition *Recent Works* was an ensemble of that kind of practice. The show consisted of five pieces, but it could be seen as a complete work that showcased Yan Xing's methodology and the characters of his art.

But Yan Xing's 'great future' is not only built on that. Compared with other Chinese artists his age, he is much quicker to realise the dangers of being labelled and to understand how the game runs in the artworld – for example, how to play a Chinese emerging artist who works in Europe and lives in the US and not be in the shadow of the mighty Ai Weiwei, the source of so many preconceived ideas about what it is to be a Chinese artist. All of Yan Xing's works to date have been flirtatious flowers growing in the soil of existing art materials. But his area of study has expanded from his desk to a broader field. Since 2014 he has been working on *The Caucasus Project* (working title), a long-term plan based on a survey of the Caucasus Mountains in which he brings an ambition to introduce a literary style – a combination of journal, travelogue and collected stories – to his work. I am looking forward to its planned completion in 2016, and before that, his new solo at Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing, this autumn.



*Modernist, Super-Modernist*, 2012, installation, performance, dimensions variable.  
Photo: Sergey Illin. Courtesy the artist and Pinchuk Art Centre, Kiev



*Hold the Thought Where the Story Was Interrupted*, 2014, wood, metal, plaster, stuffed animal, print on paper, paint. Photo: Sergey Illin. Courtesy the artist

In the spring of 2014, among the vast crowds of antigovernment protesters encamped in Kiev's Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square), were a series of ramshackle vegetable patches. Despite the pitched street battles that surrounded them, the gardens survived and produce grew, tended by an army of activists that included Nikita Kadan.

Kadan is no stranger to political action. During Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution he formed the Revolutionary Experimental Space to give an artist's voice to the anti-vote-rigging protests; his later network, the Artist Workers' Self-Defense Initiative, was born of frustration at the way that Ukraine's public art-institutions toadied to the government, even unto self-censorship. Yet there's a strong link between Kadan's activist work and his studio practice. His interest in the political and social symbolism of horticulture, born of last year's protests and connected to an ongoing fascination with architecture, ran through a recent exhibition at Waterside Contemporary in London, for example. Diagrams, taken from an old Soviet manual on how to display produce in a horticulture show, further doctored by Kadan (burlesquing government interference in every facet of society), demonstrate upright, freestanding boards that one might pin sketches to. The artist then realised these designs alongside a recreation of a Maidan vegetable patch – though within this context, the display boards, painted dazzling white with nothing attached, additionally evoked the spectre of crowd barriers and riot cages.

Alongside this installation, which in its entirety was titled *Limits of Responsibility* (2014), Kadan displayed a series of watercolours, *Untitled* (2014), in which the botanical and the anatomical were subtly welded together. The work of Kadan, whose soft speaking voice belies his anger at the situation in his home country, is characterised by its subtle delivery of activist commentary. In his earlier *Procedure Room* series (2009–10), for instance, the artist line-drew various instances of police brutality on delicate porcelain plates. Other works have seen him portray the heavy burden of Soviet and postindependence history that Ukraine continues to shoulder. In *The Catalogue of Opportunities* (2012) Kadan collected archive photographs of Soviet-era architecture, physically cutting out the sections of the buildings on which advertising hoardings are now hung; and in the architectural installation *Hold the Thought Where the Story Was Interrupted* (2014) he recreated a room from a ruined regional museum (complete with taxidermied stag) and placed it in an architecture composed of slick, white geometric walls reminiscent of neomodernist war memorials. Some of the actual museums, located in eastern Ukraine, that the work references are near-ruins, literally crumbling while the violence continues, but metaphorically so

too, in a situation in which multiple narratives of nationhood are competing with each other.

Kadan says of himself that he has two lives, dictated to him by Ukraine's democratic precarity: in times of action he's an activist, in times of reflection he's an artist. In reality, of course, these two aspects are poignantly, inextricably entwined.

*Nikita Kadan is based in Kiev, where he has been involved in a number of artist-run campaigns, including a call to boycott the Second Kiev International Biennale of Contemporary Art after the venue, Mystetskyi Arsenal, was accused of censoring an earlier exhibition. In 2011 he won the PinchukArtCentre Prize, and in 2015 his work will feature in the Istanbul Biennale, curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev.*

*Selected by Oliver Basciano, managing editor, ArtReview.*



*Buruburu*, 2010, two-channel video installation.  
Courtesy the artist

In his work, Ayrson Heráclito delves into the rich relations between Africa and Brazil, exploring political, social and cultural connections across the two territories, with a particular focus on the history of slavery and Afro-Brazilian religions, and from a privileged vantage point: Salvador, Bahia, the capital of Afro-Brazil, where he is based. Brazil has the second largest black population in the world (black being defined as people of African descent), after Nigeria, and received more Africans through the slave trade than it did Portuguese who set foot in the country to colonise it. The African presence in Brazilian popular culture is widespread, yet it remains comparatively small in the fine arts, which makes Heráclito's work even more important.

Heráclito's approach is often conceptual. He has an ongoing interest in the orisha – spirits that reflect the manifestation of gods

*Born in Macaúbas, Brazil, Ayrson Heráclito works primarily in video and photography but also in installations and other media. This year Heráclito has been shortlisted for the Novo Banco Photo award in Portugal, and in June he will have an exhibition at Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon, exploring the history of the famous Maison des Esclaves [House of Slaves] at Goré Island, Dakar, an emblematic point in the history of the slave trade.*

*Selected by Adriano Pedrosa, artistic director,  
Museu de Arte de São Paulo.*

originally coming from the African Yoruba religion – and how their codes are constructed through food and composed in language (manifested, for example, in his two-channel videowork *Buruburu*, 2010 – the title of which means popcorn in the Afro-Brazilian dialect). Palm oil, used in Angolan and Brazilian cuisine, is another food explored in the artist's work. As a liquid that links the two continents, Africa and America, Heráclito employs the palm oil motif

to counterpose 'the Black Atlantic', to use the expression coined by Paul Gilroy in his classic study on the relations between Africa and the Atlantic. A key work of his in this sense is *Divisor 2* (2001), with its deceptively minimalist appearance: palm oil, water and salt in glass containers remain unmixed: a potent metaphor for the fluid relations between Africa and Brazil.



Divisor 2, 2001, glass, salt, water, oil.  
Photo: Edson Varas. Courtesy the artist

# No Past, No Future

by J.J. Charlesworth



In the latest instalment of *ArtReview*'s ongoing investigation into contemporary art's obsession with novelty – yes, one person's 'investigation' is another person's 'obsession' – we take a look at how the New became the Now

'The atemporal song, story or painting contains elements of history but isn't historical; it is innovative but not novel, pertinent rather than prescient. In visual art, atemporality manifests itself as a kind of art-making that is inspired by, refers to, or avails itself of styles, subjects, motifs, materials, strategies, and ideas from an array of periods on the art-historical timeline.'

That's curator Laura Hoptman, writing in the catalogue for *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World*, which opened at MoMA in December. Hoptman's show – a large survey of current, mostly nonfigurative painting – wants us to believe that, maybe due to the more stridently critical era of Postmodernism being over, and to the possibility of instant access to the cultural past enabled by our new networked culture, artists are changing their attitude to the art-historical past, seeing it as a resource to be revived and replayed, while setting aside any concern about historical development or artistic progress. In the place of the present as the moment of passage from the known past to the unknown future, we now exist in the 'forever now', or the 'eternal present'.

*The Forever Now* is only the latest in a recent tendency, as literary critic Michael North observed in the December 2014 issue of *ArtReview*, for art exhibitions to celebrate 'the now'. As theorist Suhail Malik argued in *ArtReview's* January & February 2015 issue, contemporary art is 'contemporary' because it diminishes and flattens the difference between the present and the past of art, in which 'the new' is no longer the emblem of historical change, but merely an indefinite, perpetual state of repetition of what already is; a tautological state where 'contemporary art's newness is a holding pattern for the metastable configuration proliferating the kind of art we're familiar enough with, a genre called contemporary art'.

The preoccupation with the now indicates how unsure contemporary art has become, not only about the value of the new but also about the purpose of the new with regard to the past, and to the future. As Hoptman goes to great pains to argue, 'atemporal' art – the supposedly defining condition of art today – is one that, while cognisant of (art) history, is no longer burdened with the oppressive sense of responsibility to be new – to participate, that is, in the development of art in a progressive sense. The new was, of course, a defining claim for much of Modernism and the modern period. Thumbing through the subject index of my old student copy of the anthology *Art in Theory 1900–1990* (1992), I'm struck by how those old modernists weren't ever embarrassed to declare the new: art nouveau, Neue Sachlichkeit, Neo-Plasticism, Neo-Classicism, Neo-Impressionism, Neo-Primitivism, Neue Sezession, Nouveau Réalisme, New Spirit. Yet one thing that's evident from that nonexhaustive list of modernist, twentieth-century 'news' and 'neos' is how their claim to the new was often the basis of a return to, or a renovation of, the past – of past movements and past moments: no Neo-Impressionism without Impressionism, no Neo-Plasticism without, one would suppose, 'Plasticism'. So if nothing else, the claim to newness doesn't have to mean an absolute rupture with the past – although much of the more strident avant-gardism of the last century was happy to strike that pose. Despite itself, the new has always had a tense relationship with the

idea of historical continuity; building, revising or destroying what has gone before, but understanding itself to be active and reactive to what continues into the present from the past.

By contrast, contemporary art seems oddly wary of its relationship to the past. Like much of early-twenty-first-century culture, contemporary art has to live with the consequences of how historical time appears to have become complicated, critically and politically, by the social and cultural developments of the last 30 years. In local terms, contemporary art is the descendant of that big rupture with Modernism that was initially known as Postmodernism, which first found its footing during the mid-1970s. And in a global context, contemporary art is the emergent product of a political landscape defined not only by the end of the Cold War a quarter of a century ago, but by the consequences of that end, as the 1990s progressed, for the idea of historical progress. Throw in the Internet-driven digitalisation of culture and cultural knowledge since the beginning of the 2000s, and you have all the ingredients for how the New loses its capital N, becoming merely new, while the same capital shifts, so that the now becomes the all-encompassing, eternal Now.

One of Hoptman's recurring arguments to support the idea of

the 'eternal present' that supposedly underpins the work of current artists is that with the rise of the instantly accessible digital archive, our distance from the past becomes compressed and flattened. With the past instantly accessible, art becomes a matter of remixing disparate antecedents, not pursuing a 'linear' development from a single artistic position to a next one in the

future. It's an attractive argument, if only because it chimes with our current preoccupation with the exaggerated sense of immediacy offered by network culture, ably exploited by net theorists such as Doug Rushkoff in his 2013 book *Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now*. From this perspective, the new becomes an act not of developing, revising or abolishing what has come to us from the past but merely one of recombining the ultimately substitutable iterations of all the art that has previously been made.

Though like most arguments that depend exclusively on a single, narrow cause, it sounds convincing but is actually wrong. Because although the rise of Web 2.0, with its meta-data and semantic search, dramatises the experience of simultaneity and temporal depthlessness, art's problem with its own past (let alone the past) runs far deeper. In fact, it is contemporary art's peculiar institutional relationship to art history that produces the paradoxical flattening of the past into the present. It is the institutionalisation of past art as art history by the new institutions of contemporary art – a process in which past art appears as historically disconnected from the present – that paradoxically makes the past immediately, simultaneously present to artists today. This requires a little explanation.

If the critical break of Postmodernism with the 'modernist' past was a cultural and theoretical one, it was also an institutional one, in the sense that Postmodernism quickly became a real institution – that

is, it became the dominant form of discourse for art, reproduced and perpetuated by art-school theory tutors, art-history departments, curatorship courses, museums, galleries and the art

*facing page* Kenji Kawakami, *Romper Mop*, c. 2004, microfibre mop, cotton romper. Courtesy Jean-Christophe Lecoq. Included in the exhibition *Le Bord des Mondes*

market. As a dominant form of discourse, it soon became orthodox rather than radical, and quickly mutated into the complex of the institutions of contemporary art with which we are familiar today – the theory-literate art school, the museum and public gallery as a site of artistic production (not just presentation), the proactive curator and the periodic international exhibition (biennials, triennials and the like). Increasingly generic, increasingly global, this complex of institutions produces, almost without realising it, an ever-expanding and increasingly total archival, taxonomic memory of art's past. Significantly, that past is always the past *before* the emergence of the current discursive institution of contemporary art – that is, any art roughly prior to the 1980s, which is when the institutionalisation of postmodern discourse began to take hold. All of art's history before then becomes collapsible into a single retrospective rearview image, seen from inside the present-day institution of contemporary art, by those of us who operate from within it. The advent of networked culture did not invent this, but dramatically accelerated and formalised an already-existing dynamic.

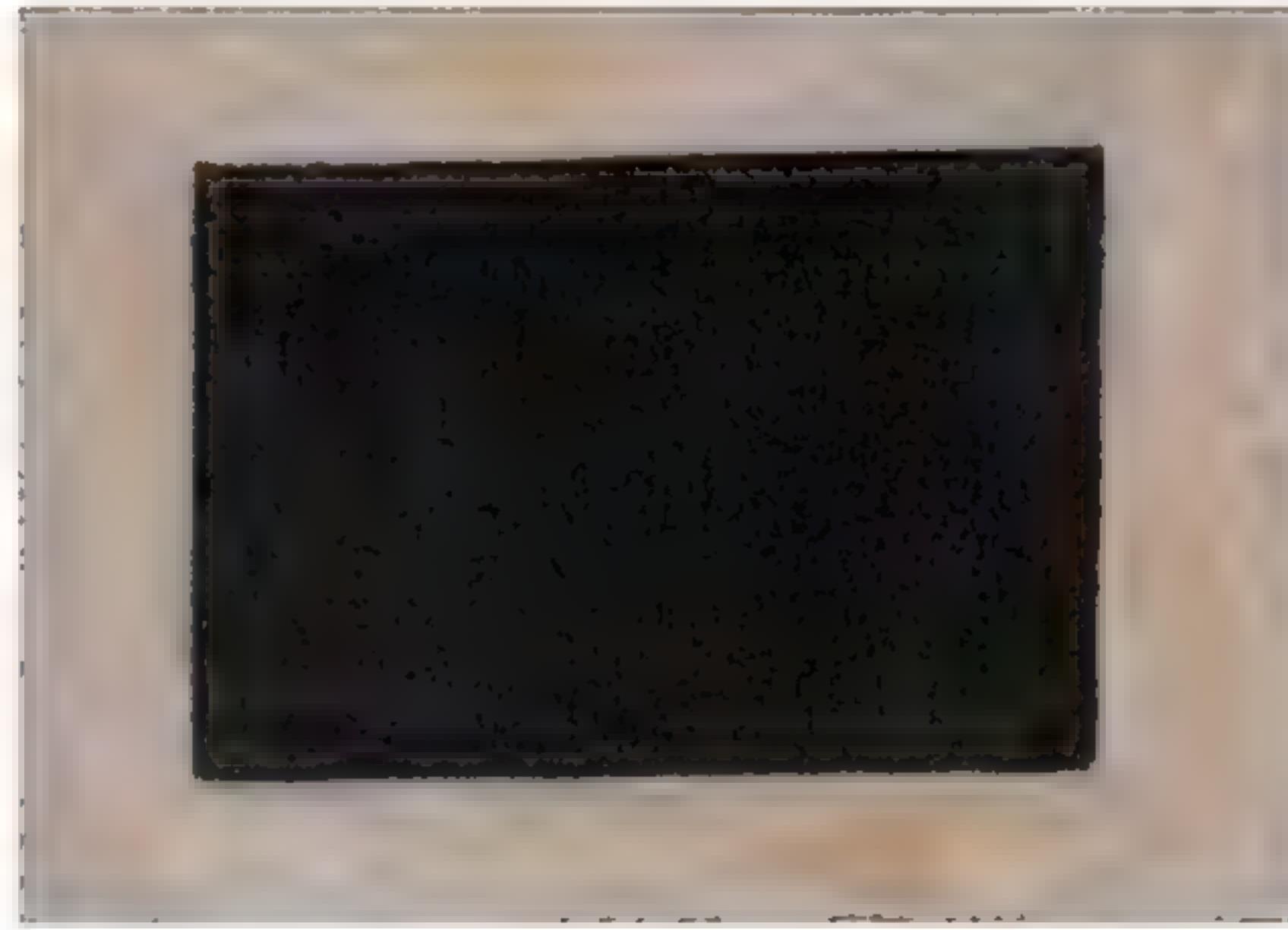
If history can appear as history at all, it is because the circumstances that make historical events – social, political, economic, cultural, intellectual, institutional – are unstable, mutable and subject to change through their interactions, and are eventually impermanent. Crucially, history is made by human beings taking action to change what is given, and with it the idea of 'something else'. Institutions, movements and schools all emerge and disappear. And one of the key differences between all those modernist 'neos' and 'news' and the present of contemporary art, in institutional terms, is that these artistic movements principally existed *outside* of institutionalised knowledge, outside of the academy and the museum, and had to *make* their own present, often in direct conflict with orthodox culture. (It is sometimes shocking to recall that, up until relatively recently, it was normal for artistic movements to have become completely forgotten by later practitioners, unless the knowledge of those movements was passed on directly through lineages of generational influence.) The new, in this formation, was the claim actively to make and shape the present, against the dead, institutionalised repetition of tradition sanctioned by the power of the academy, but also against the corrosive power of cultural forgetting.

But contemporary art's sense of the now is one opposed to change, although it seems as if the new is being constantly produced. The contemporary production of newness that occurs in an institutional complex which itself remains entirely static, and is moreover endowed with an increasingly total institutional memory: the vast production of MFA graduates, the reduplication and proliferation of theoretical frameworks, the circulation of intellectual capital between the art school, the museum and the biennial, form a huge but closed circuit. It is no wonder that the art of the past seems exotic,

while being instantly retrievable. At its root, 'exotic' eventually means 'from outside'. If the past has become something 'outside', it is because the contemporary has closed itself off from historical change within an institutional formation that cannot imagine its own end. (This is also why, incidentally, the curatorial systems of contemporary art are now frequently haunted by the figure of the 'Outsider' artist; as with Massimiliano Gioni's 2013 Venice Biennale, *The Encyclopedic Palace*, the Hayward Gallery's *Alternative Guide to the Universe*, also from 2013, or the recently opened Palais de Tokyo show of extra-artistic creativity, *Le Bord des Mondes*.)

To survey the past as an 'outside' from the point of view of a present which doesn't change is a tacit admission that change leads nowhere, that change always just leads to another kind of present, in which the future and the past are qualitatively interchangeable. In a revealing line, Hoptman declares that 'what first might appear as a mining of the past in order to go back in time is actually a will to experience historical form as if for the first time – that is, without the burden of chronology'. But why should art feel history – 'chronology' – to be a burden? Only if it is an art that has no desire to take inspiration from the past, or to reshape the present into the future – or as Hoptman would have it, 'that rejects the notion of development'.

Concurrent with MOMA's *The Forever Now* in New York, London's Whitechapel Gallery is showing *Adventures of the Black Square: Abstract Art and Society 1915–2015*, its remarkable, if uneven celebration of a century of geometric abstraction, starting in 1915 with Kazimir Malevich's groundbreaking monochrome



Kazimir Malevich, *Black Quadrilateral*, undated, oil on canvas, 17 x 24 cm.  
Courtesy Greek State Museum of Contemporary Art – Costakis Collection, Thessaloniki

canvases, among them *Black Quadrilateral* (undated, but likely from that year). As a painting, *Black Quadrilateral* isn't much to look at, but in a way that's not the point. As the Whitechapel's Iwona Blazwick puts it in her catalogue essay, abstraction's 'very blankness represented the exhilarating void of the unknown and a springboard for the imagining of new tomorrows'. Today that's a wildly optimistic statement, in a culture whose 'imagined tomorrows' are almost all ends, or catastrophes. Still, the challenge of Malevich's black void remains there in front of you. *Black Quadrilateral* isn't 'relevant' to the now, nor does it deal with the now's 'issues'. You could of course take it as just another of those art-historical precedents, as you watch it recede in the rearview mirror of art's past. Or instead you could take it as a window onto a view of a world that *still*, a century later, doesn't yet exist. The image of the now, as it becomes the new. ar

*The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World* is at MOMA, New York, through 5 April;  
*Adventures of the Black Square: Abstract Art and Society 1915–2015* is at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, through 6 April;  
*Le Bord des Mondes* is on show at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, through 17 May

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## Want Internet-inspired art? In a gallery show? One artist has found a way of doing it that captures the spirit of digital within the confines of 'real' space and time

by Mark Rappolt

'TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN'. That was the slogan drawn onto a large canvas when I first encountered a large group of New York-based German Florian Meisenberg's work last summer in Berlin, in a solo exhibition mysteriously titled *Somewhere sideways, down, at an angle, but very close*, at Wentrup gallery.

The work on show took diverse forms. There were paintings, most of which contained references to digital culture in the form of iPad icons, emoticons and references to the 'PDF' acronym (the works hung against a wallpaper based on Photoshop's transparency grid), as well as more formal nods to Helen Frankenthaler, Joan Miró and Wassily Kandinsky, and the odd greasy hand- or footprint. There were videos, shown on flatscreens attached to floor-to-ceiling poles in the middle of the gallery so that the videos looked at once like paintings, framed by the screen edge; sculptures, defined by the screens as objects floating in midair; and pole-dancing performers. And there was a jumble of A4 paper printouts on the floor, faceup and facedown, many bearing footprints and other such evidence of viewers' attention or lack of it. The effect of the whole was like witnessing the detritus of an office party, one at which someone had run up a large photocopying bill. Intact, here, was all the flirtatiousness that goes with the office-party stereotype – achieved, not least, by the engagement with and manipulation of various media and their traditional strategies.

One thing in particular was striking: that if a solo exhibition is typically a format for showcasing individual genius and soliciting admiration (presumably also financial) for it, Meisenberg had here both celebrated and undermined that function. He had asserted the performative aspect of 'the exhibition' as an artworld ritual or structure, and also denied it. The sheets of paper on the floor fluttered down from printers mounted just below the gallery ceiling, like weirdly sporadic confetti or the output of an exploded office block. Their somewhat random contents were the offerings of friends, artists, authors and curators invited to transmit tweets and posts into the show, providing it with context and community – beyond the internal art-historical references of any one work – that it might not otherwise have had. In a real way, the network was present, the lone genius denied.

"The Internet is responsible for a democratisation of aesthetics," Meisenberg explains. "Not only in art, but in all cultural and social fields. In other words we no longer really see individual artistic approaches within a naturally grown environment of a language simultaneously self-developing, but widespread aesthetic phenomena or movements. Credited to the incredible pace and half-life of the Internet, these movements are generally more defined

and categorised by their aesthetic appearance than by a mutual concept or meaning."

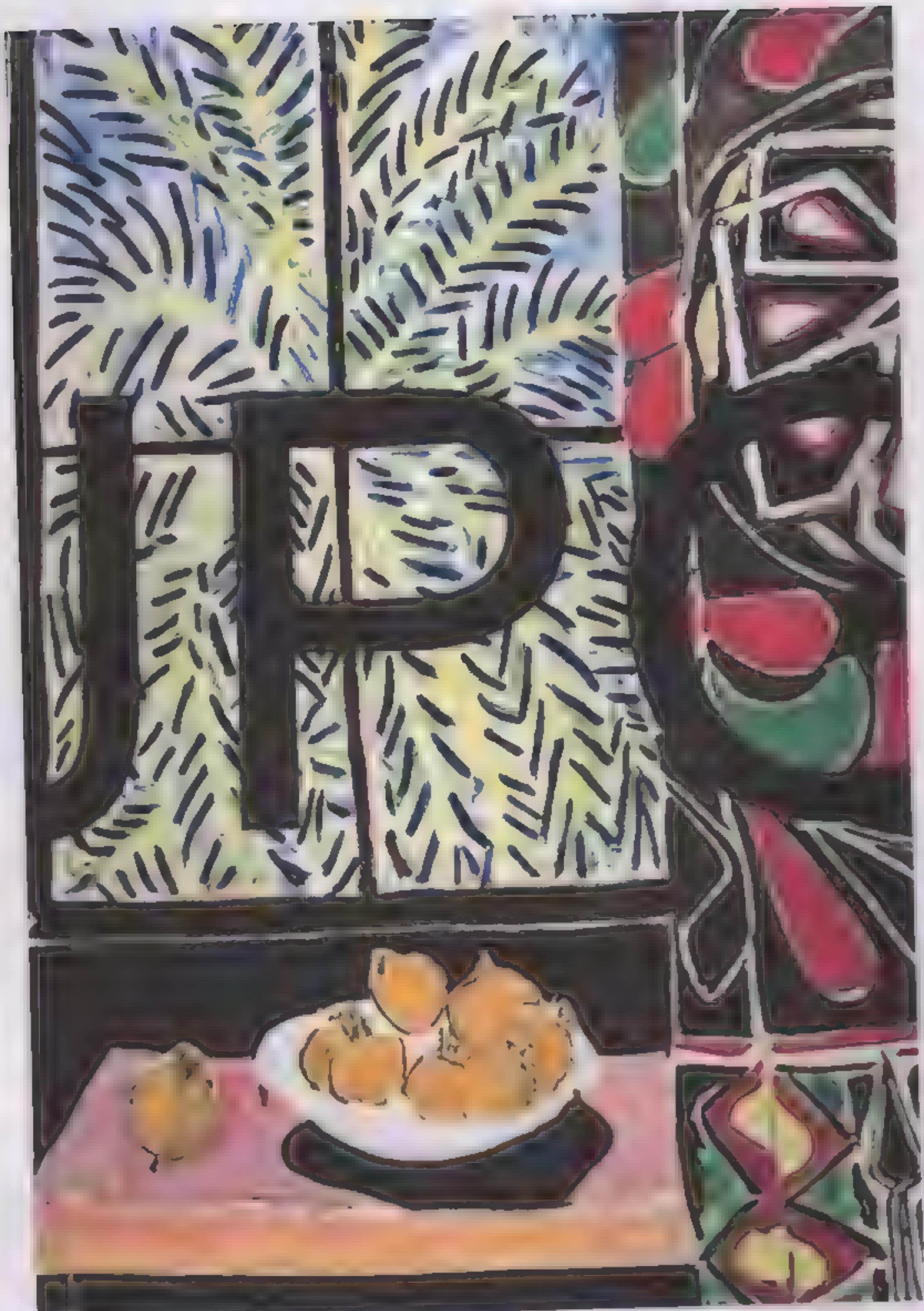
Meisenberg's short videos demonstrate this further. In *Wembley, farewell my Concubine* (2013) a cat, behind a shop window, responds to the artist's hand as it reaches into shot, as if to caress it from the other side of the glass. The cat reacts as if the caresses were real. Meanwhile, in *Life during wartime* (2012, the title lifted from a 1979 Talking Heads song) Meisenberg films himself drawing, in increasingly frenzied fashion, row after row of alternating smiley and sad-faced emoticons on a fogged-up bathroom mirror, the fog preventing us from seeing his face as he walks back and forth.

What makes Meisenberg's work special is the way he connects his combination of simple, elegant, humorous, yet serious attempts to investigate how art and the structures that surround it do and can behave in a world suspended between analogue and digital realities, and his consciousness of the way in which those investigations resonate in a 'real' world increasingly mediated by the screen.

"I see in the Internet endless capacities for collaboration," Meisenberg continues, "to reveal hidden existing or create new choreographies or architectures of collaboration within or via the Internet. It is basically the *ultimate collaborative utopian machine*, which for me is not yet fully understood or basically ignored, as we still mainly use the Internet as single users or, so to say, individuals and more generally as the Internet is mainly colonised or misused in capitalistic means."

And whom does that concern? Everyone.

New work by Florian Meisenberg, featuring a 'two-channel interactive-live-feed-fluid-simulation' as well as the most recent series of paintings, will be on view at Simone Subal Gallery, New York, through 5 April. Images on the pages that follow are selected from those inputted to *Somewhere sideways, down, at an angle, but very close* by: Elene Abashidze, Ali Altin, Joel Baumann, Fritz Bornstück, Carson Chan, Cultural Avenue – Johanna Stemmler & Friedrich Grafling, Alexander Dumbadze, Gia Edzgveradze, Carolin Eidner, Christian Falsnaes, Jeremy Hoevenaar, Gregor Jansen, Gianni Jetzer, Anna K.E., Tamara K.E., Nathan Duc Koestlin, Catherine Lampert, Dan Leverson, Veit Loers, Florian Meisenberg, Anna-Lena Meisenberg, Nessa Nikolic, Ninja Tag Team – Joachim Baldauf & Uta Grosenick, Aled Rees, David Renggli, Hayley Aviva Silverman, The Simple Society – T.S. Wendelstein & Miki Kadokura, Avery K. Singer, Noemi Smolik, Oliver Tepel, Leopold Thun, Keith J. Varadi, Hamza Walker, Sascha Welchering, Philip Wiegagen, Charles Wintham, Pedro Witz and Jan Zabeil. Courtesy the artist and Wentrup, Berlin



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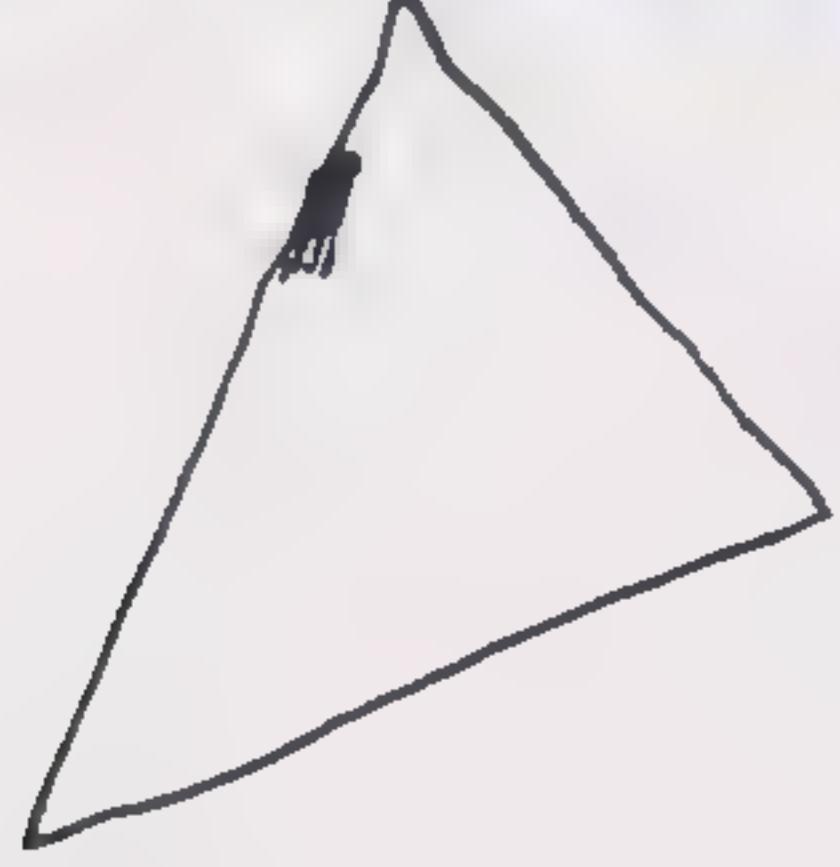
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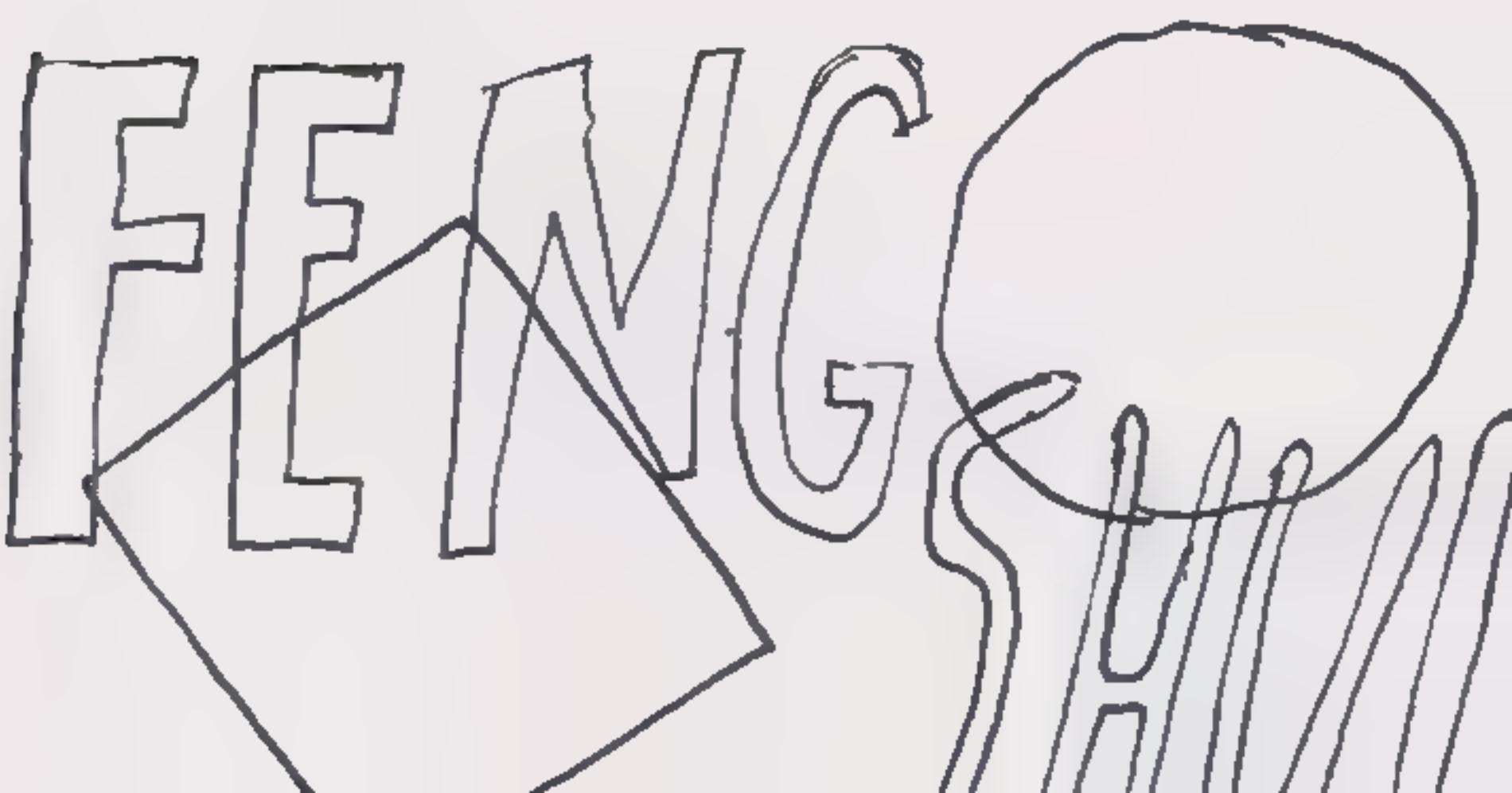


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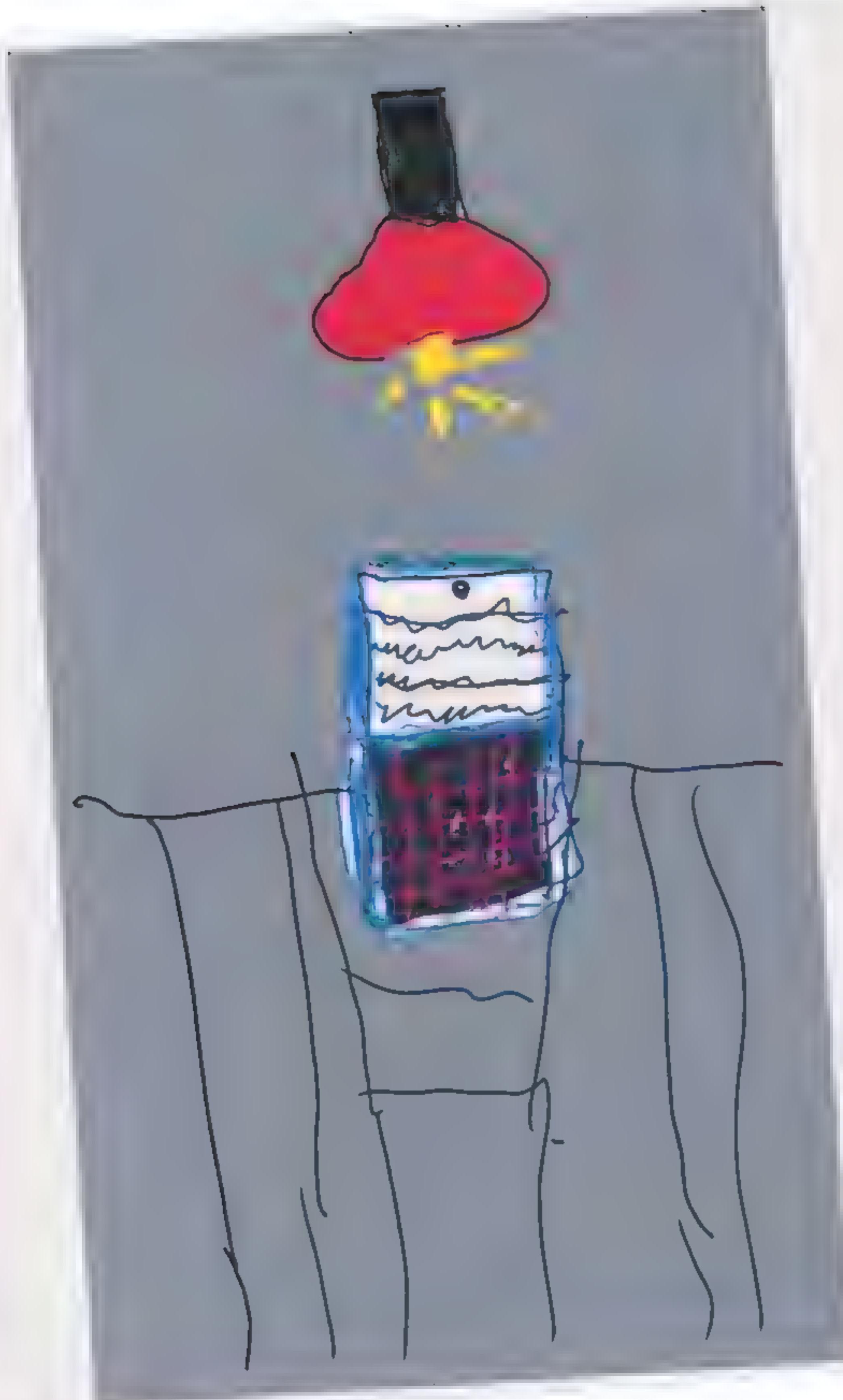


Curious Linda is body-snake  
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so having return from  
its silent laughter from  
Crushed speech or being  
Cracking like shell that  
breaks you elsewhere  
backwards your mind in  
a vapour dart fired  
to nothing, returned  
to you a desiccated hush  
for your delectation  
yet go up there in  
the white dark, fast  
to dilate, dilate, dilate



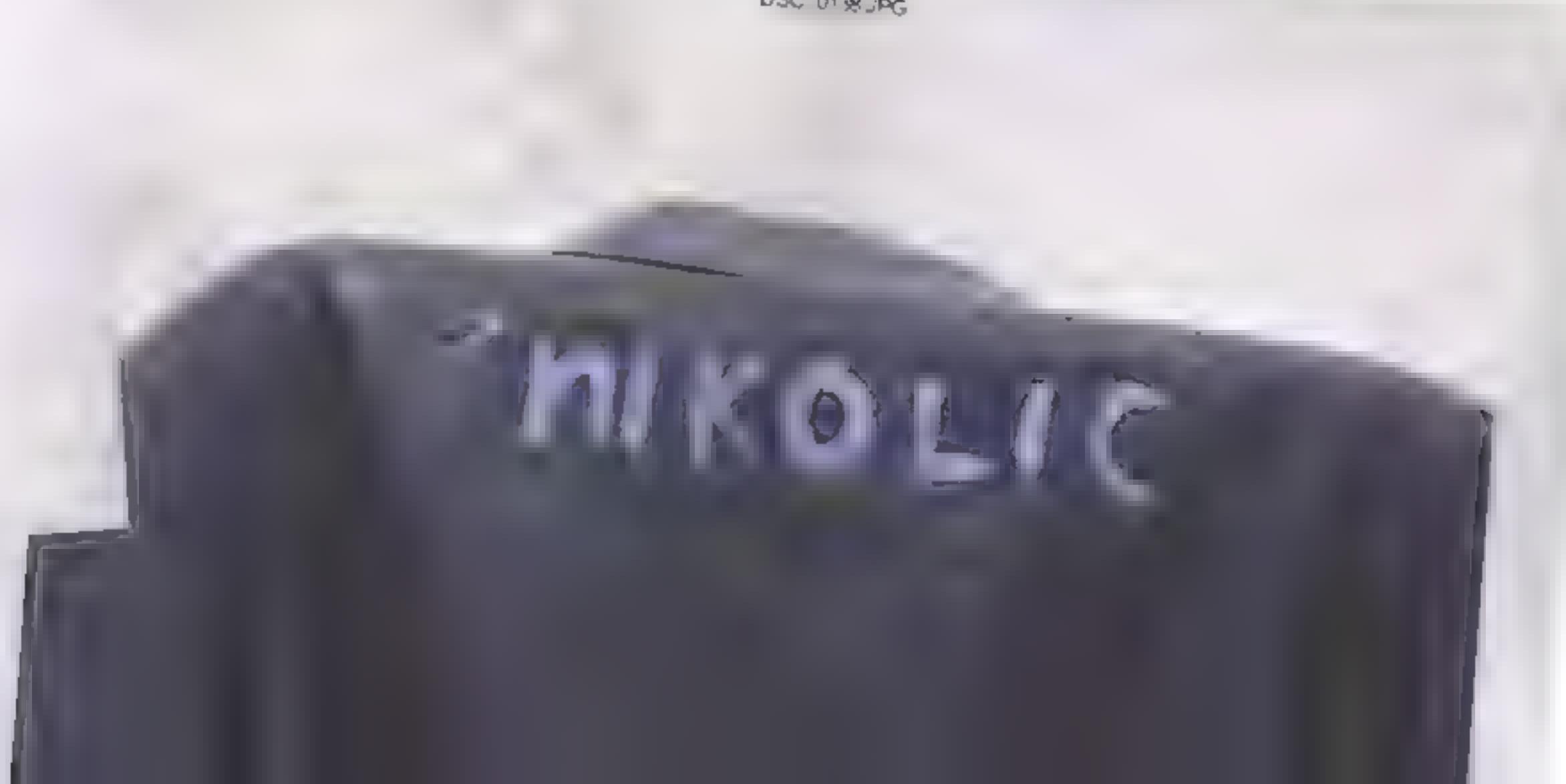
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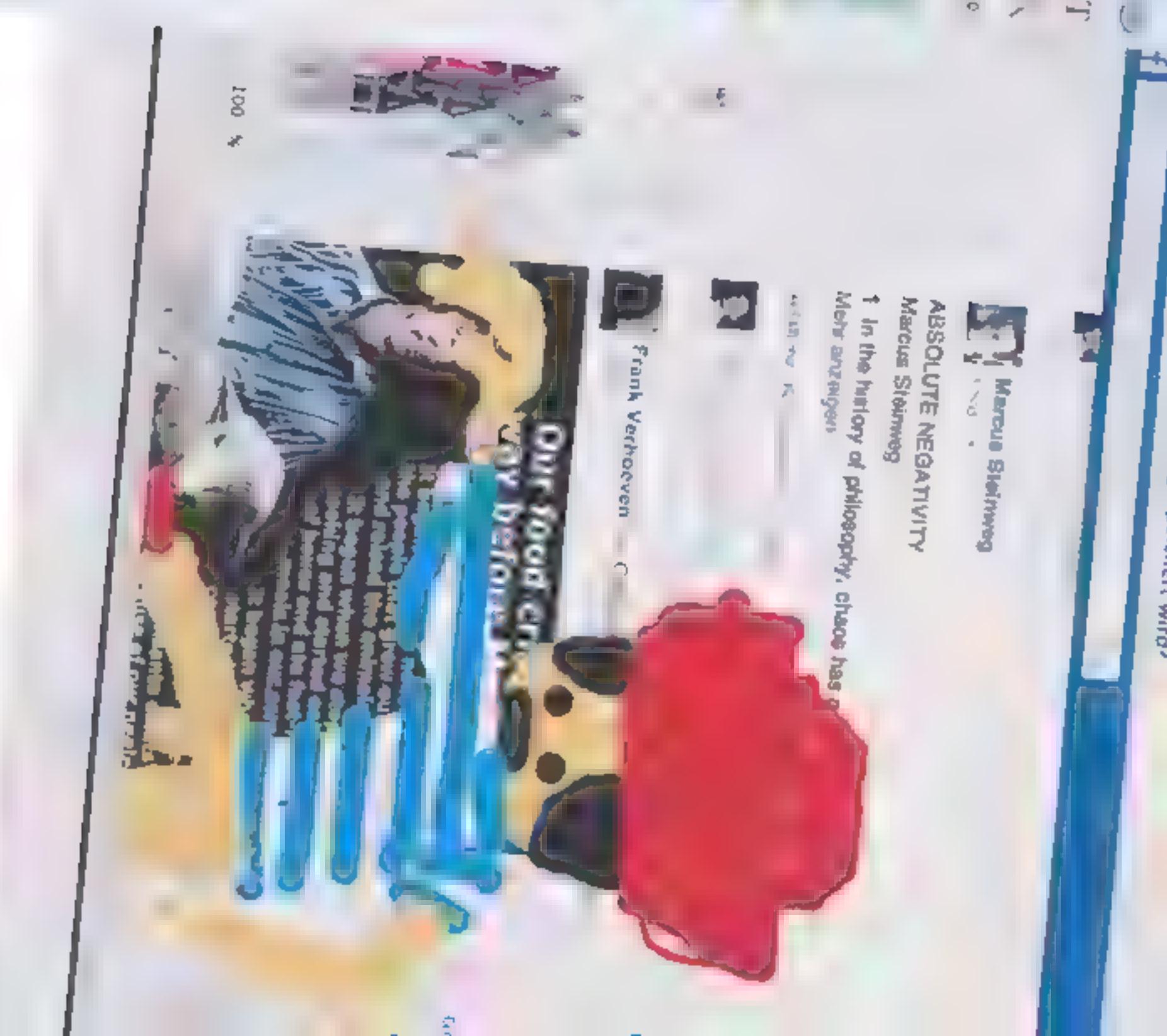
A body's movement can be a contagious event

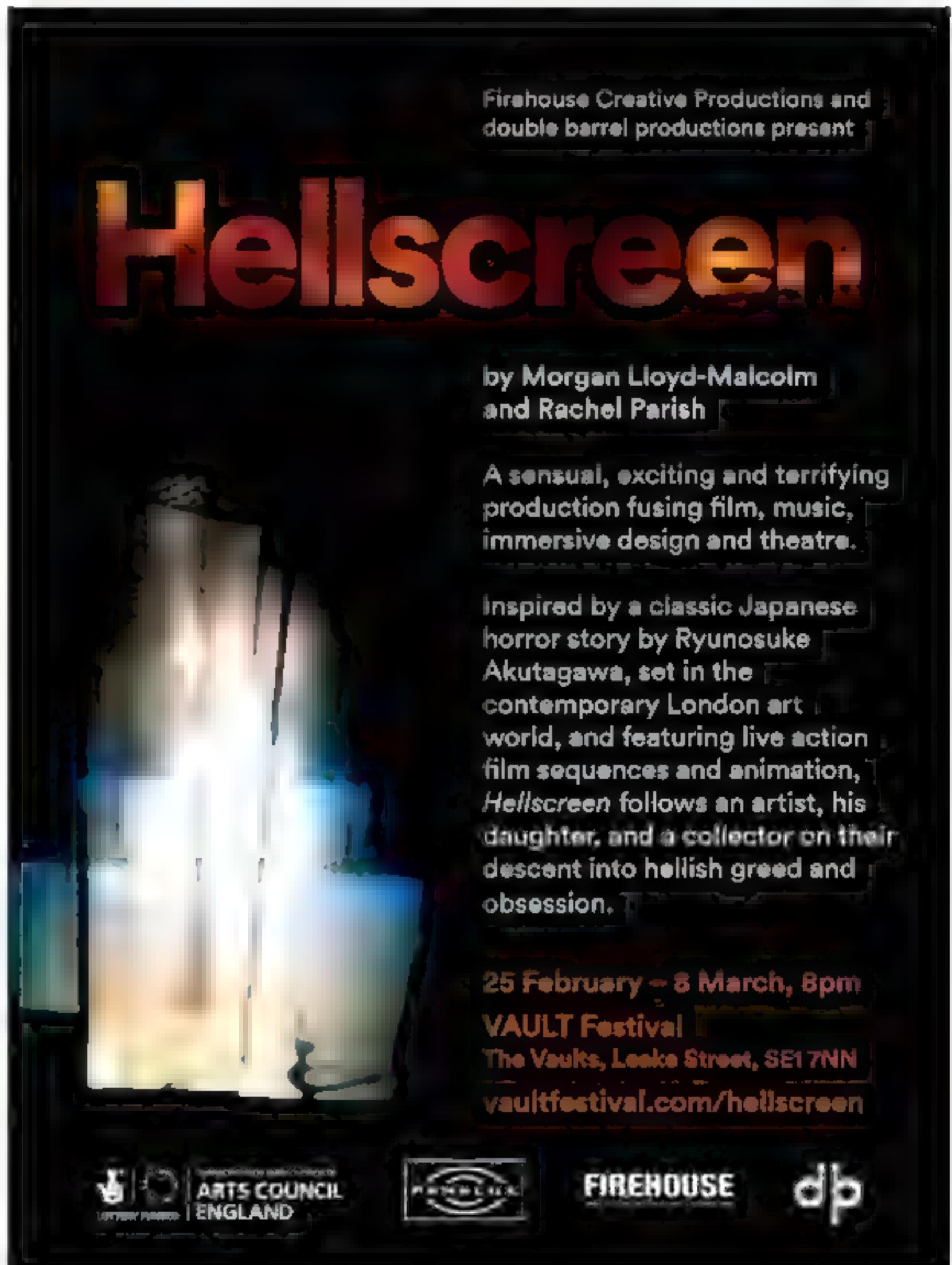
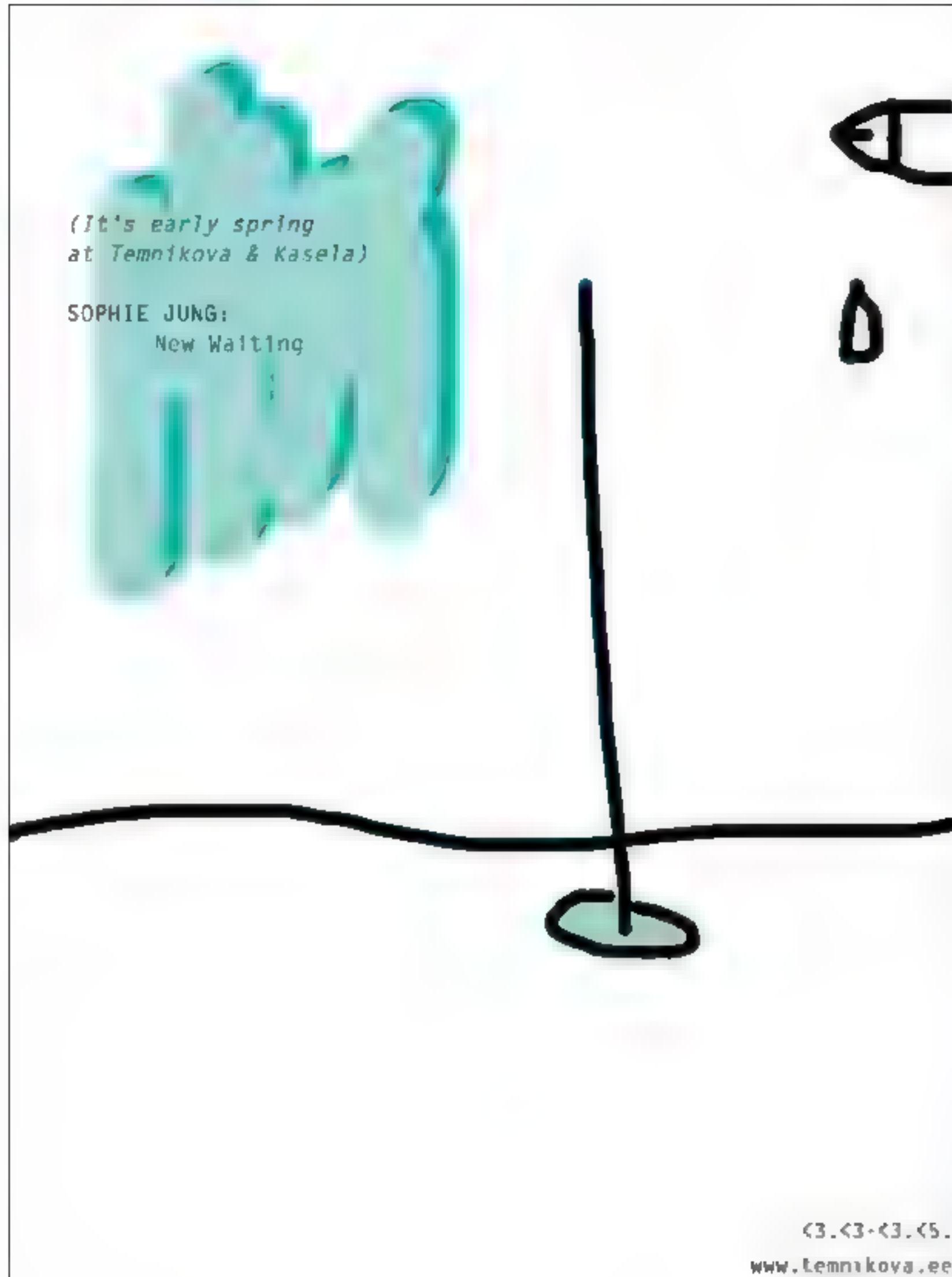


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# *The Divine Comedy: Heaven, Hell, Purgatory Revisited by Contemporary African Artists*

MMK, Frankfurt 1 March – 27 July

There is hardly any poem, hardly any piece of literature that has had to bear both the exaltation and wrath of pens (even metaphorical ones) of generations of reviewers, imitators, translators and critics afforded Dante Alighieri's early-fourteenth-century epic, *Divina Commedia* (*Divine Comedy*). It has been crowned one of the greatest pieces in world literature, and been damned as anti-Semitic, anti-Islamist, racist and more. Artists of all generations and cultures have tried their hands at unpacking Dante's allegorical visions. Philosophers and theologians alike have cracked their brains on contextualising it and tying it to everything from Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* (1265–74) to contemporary music, cinema and other forms of cultural expression.

It is at this juncture in 2014 that the Swiss-Cameroonian curator Simon Njami strides in... Majestically and like a cowboy in one of John Wayne's westerns, he calls the shots. In two directions. On the one hand he acknowledges the intellectual grandeur of *Divine Comedy* and on the other hand he condemns the lack of a significant African presence in this epic poem. This was enough of a reason to invite some 50 artists of African origin to deliberate on the journey of the soul in the afterlife,

the underlying philosophical question behind the poem, in a survey show titled *The Divine Comedy: Heaven, Hell, Purgatory Revisited by Contemporary African Artists* at the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main.

It would be wrong however to think that this exhibition is an effort to translate the words of the poem into a visual language. The poem rather serves as a point of departure, even a bait: a magnetic point against which and to which the artists bring in their reflections – the latter nuanced by their diverse historical, socio-economic and political backgrounds. Partitioned like the poem in three canticles – Paradise, Purgatory and Hell – the exhibition lures the visitor through the three floors of Hans Hollein's architectural masterpiece, to confront artistic reflections of humanity's biggest unknown, that which one must pay with life in order to experience – death.

From the point of view of the Roman Catholic, concepts like heaven, purgatory and hell are stripped of abstract connotations. They are made real and given an image. At Sunday school and later during the sacrament of the confirmation you are told that on the final day, on Judgement Day, you will have to stand in front of God and all your good deeds and sins

will be listed and you will be channelled to heaven or hell... and because God is such a kind God, he keeps an option for the benefit of doubt – purgatory. Heaven is that place of the ever-pouring milk and honey, of no distress or pain. A concept of endless satisfaction and ecstasy. Hell is that space of endless light. A light that emanates from the hottest flames one could think of. The very painful but slow and unending burn of that gorging flame in hell becomes the stuff of kids' nightmares. And if you are lucky or unlucky (depending on where you stand) not to get an immediate visa into heaven or hell, you are sent to purgatory to work yourself up or down.

In the very elaborate exhibition publication, theorist Achille Mbembe begins his article, 'Requiem for the Slave', by stating, 'Ancient Africa has no hell, no purgatory and no paradise. The idea of a unique, angry, jealous and vengeful God is an invention of monotheism.' It is no secret that Africa and Africans have been doing the balancing act between indigenous and imported religions ever since Christianity first set foot on the continent at the beginning of the first century. This exhibition seems to cover pendulumlike swings between these extremes.

The philosophical journey starts in paradise with Jane Alexander's *Frontier with Church* (2012–14).



Jane Alexander, *Frontier with Church*, 2012–14

Thirteen fibreglass half-human, half-beast figures enact the moment before Dante's meeting with Beatrice, the woman who symbolises the path to God. Zoulkha Bouabdellah's installation *Silence* (2008) on the one hand comments on the Islamic practice of taking off shoes before going into the mosque by placing gold high-heeled shoes in holes cut in the centre of prayer mats, but also offers a counter-comment on the position of women in Islam. Maybe a feminist statement on a male-dominated concept of paradise? Abdoulaye Konaté's textile series *Danse au cimm* (2008) explores the magic and heavenliness of the medium of dance. Closely affiliated to the medium of music, both dance and music stand in as the closest means through which the 'Holy Ghost' can be evoked – be it through Gnawa, Sufi or Gospel, spirituality finds form in music and dance.

The possibility of fixing things while in purgatory is extrapolated in Kader Attia's research on the concept of repair materialised in his 2013 work *Repair Analysis*. Attia stitches mirrors with copper wires, thereby alluding to both the ad hoc surgery on the battlefronts of the First World War and the reparation of non-Western artefacts. The work talks about the impossibility of certain repairs and how reparation doesn't simply imply the rendering of the original but rather the giving of new meaning, form and function through the process of repair. Issues of appropriation and reparation have been the backbone of Kader Attia's work

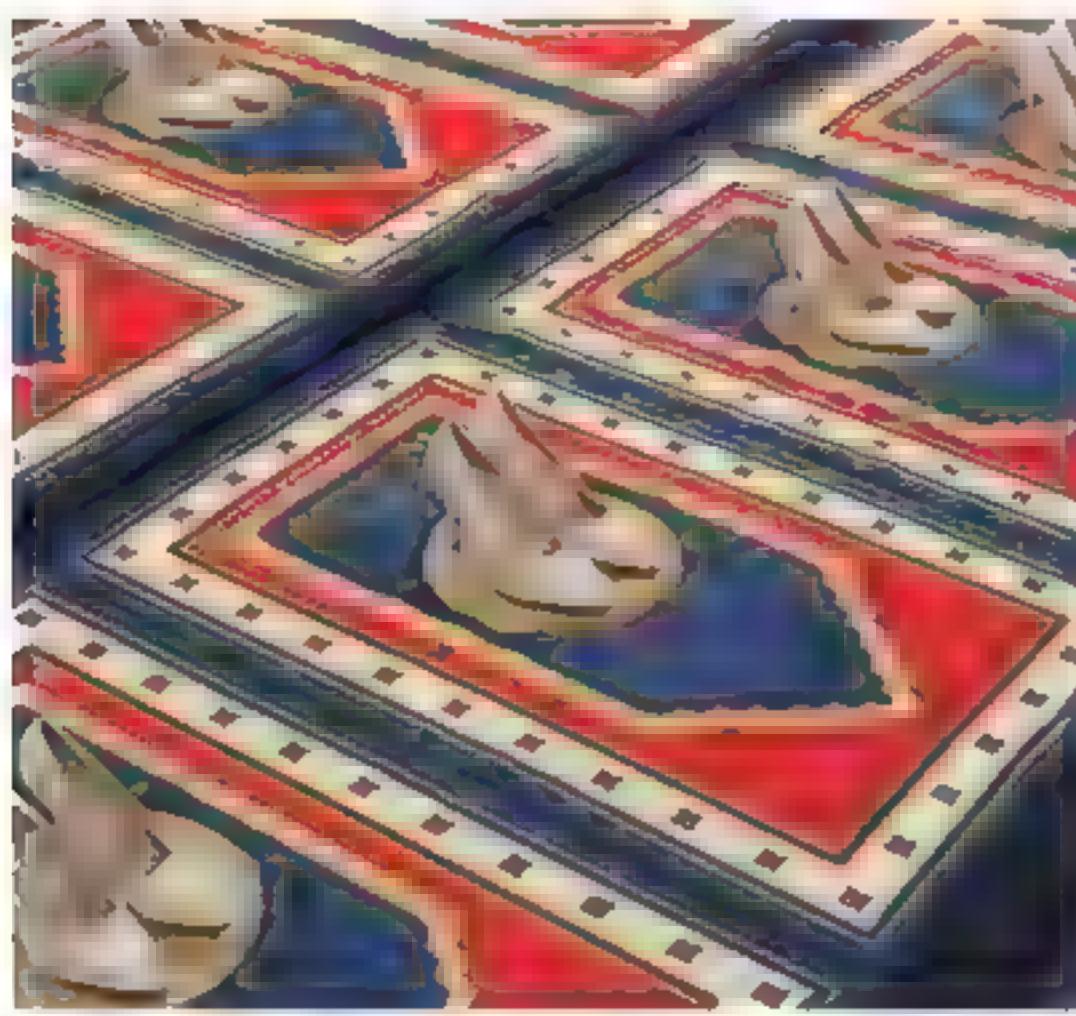
in the last half-decade. Other spectacular contributions to the theme of purgatory include Kudzanai Chiurai's film *Iyeza* (2012), which is a rough citation of the Last Supper and a depiction of the sociopolitical status quo of most African countries that seem to be in a kind of political limbo; Dimitri Fagbohoun's *Réfrigerium* (2014); and Andrew Tshabangu's *On Sacred Ground* (1996–2008), a black-and-white photographic series on religious and spiritual cleansing as a possibility to free individuals and communities from the pain of everyday life. The strongest intervention within purgatory is Kiluanji Kia Henda's series of five photographs, *Othello's Fate* (2013), part of the ongoing project *Self-Portrait As a White Man*, which was inspired by Shakespeare's *Othello, the Moor of Venice* (1604). In this series Kia Henda explores the precarious state of the African presence in Europe, stuck between heaven and hell.

Hell seems the place to be, however... at least to sojourn and ponder, judging from the colossal contributions by Sammy Baloji (*Kolwezi*, 2012, a photographic series that depicts the hard labour of goldmines), Mouna Karray (*The Rope*, 2014, a photographic series that hints at one's own attachment to hell, the tug of war one might have with oneself as a vision of hell. The rope takes centre stage in the piece and at both ends of that rope is the same person pulling to exhaustion) or Jems Robert Koko Bi (*Convoi Royal*, 2007, a mountain of blackened wood heads). Bili Bidjocka has more than often proven

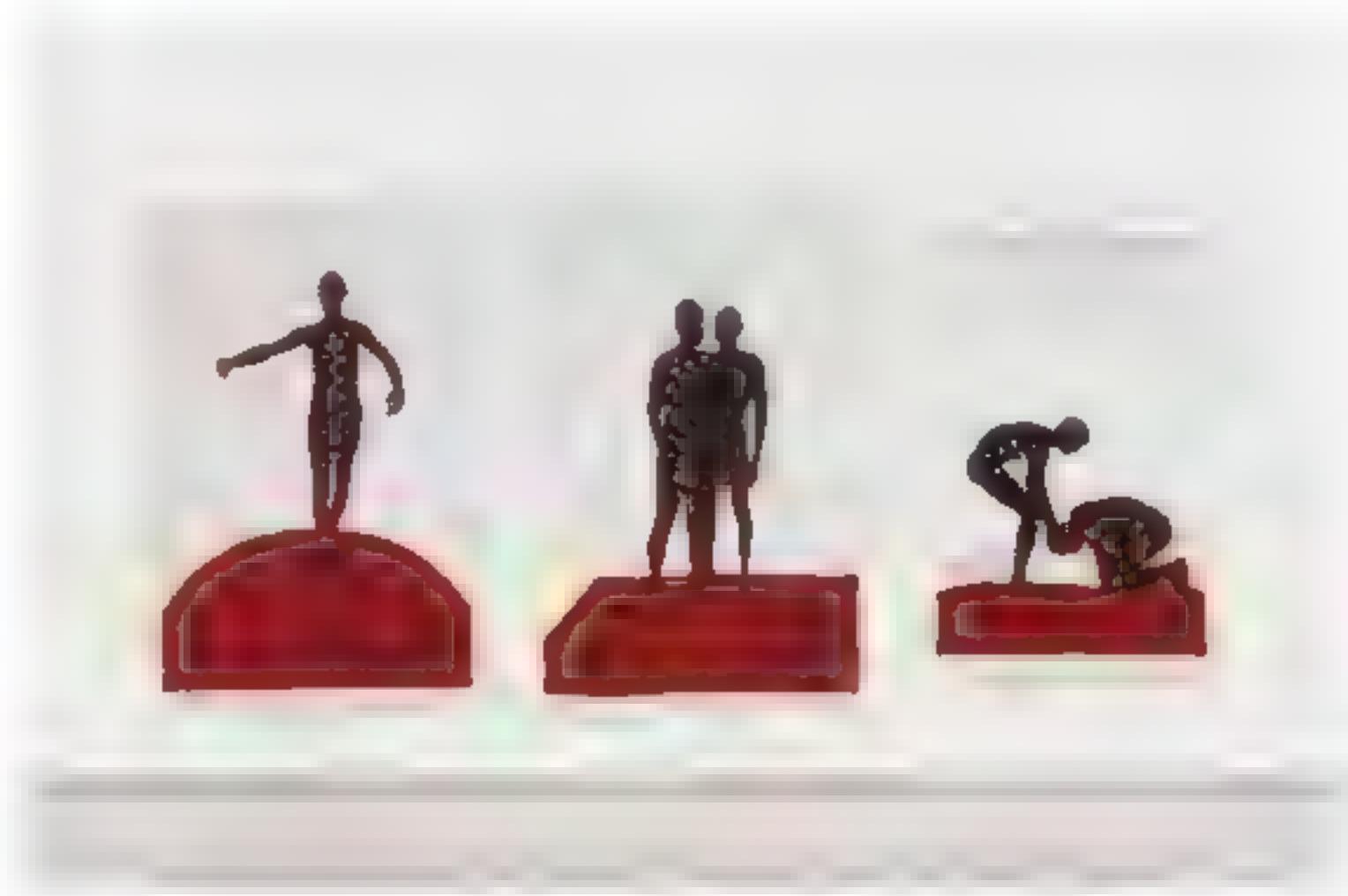
philosophical strength in his artistic practice. In *Grâces & Intentions & Grâces* (2014), the artist gets granular on the proverb 'The road to hell is paved with good intentions'. Looking at this from the perspective of philanthropy, humanitarianism, third worldism, and looking at the dependence, corruption, blackmail these concepts have instigated in the world today, the expression adds a wholeness to its skeleton.

Yet it is important to mention that this exhibition is in no way an African exhibition. Not even if all the artists in the show are in some way or the other related to Africa. There is a cultivation of simplicity in many Western societies and media today that pushes towards finding the cheapest or easiest common denominator. There could be, and in the case of this exhibition there are, many reasons that bring people together other than that they happen to be from the same continent. In the case of Simon Njami's *Divine Comedy*, this common denominator is the zeal and zest to understand the complexities of what an afterlife could entail, taking Dante's epic poem as a point of departure. This is the answer I gave to the older German guy (whom I had never met before) who whispered in my ear – with a mixture of despair and perplexity – while I was looking at Joël Andrianomearisoa's five-by-three-metre shimmering installation of hundreds of pocket mirrors, *Sentimental Negotiations Act v* (2013), "This doesn't really look like African art."

Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung



above from left Zoulkha Bouabdellah, *Silence*, 2008;  
Abdoulaye Konaté, *La Danseuse*, 2007



all images installation view, MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt am Main, 2014. Photo: Axel Schneider. © MMK Frankfurt

## Melvin Edwards

Stephen Friedman Gallery, London 25 November–23 January

Los Angeles, 1963; amid nationwide debates for an abstract 'art for art's sake', and a more figurative art that was perceived as being more political, and therefore more relevant to the ongoing Civil Rights Movement, sculptor Melvin Edwards chose... both. The welded steel works he has created over the following 50 years have hovered between a stern modernist formalism and suggestive biomorphic shapes, while all the while remaining resolutely what they are: masses of chains, railroad spikes, gears, hammers and axes. It's just metal, but it's also the gruff, raw materials of industry, labour and slavery. *Then There Here and Now – Circle Today* (1970/2014) comprises in part several dozen lines of barbed wire that swoop down from the ceiling, attached at the wall to form a circle; the sharp lines still manage to create a soothing shape akin to a seashell or flowing hair. His *Lynch Fragments* series, begun in 1963 and still going, are dense assemblages of industrial scraps, all roughly head-size and hung at head height

on the wall, as if some sort of mounted trophy. *Amandla* (1981) looks like the head of a bull or horned devil-like creature from a distance, though up close it falls apart into its constituent parts of a horseshoe and chain shot through with a long, cruelly bent spike. Three nails curve up like small hands to crown *Night Talk* (1986), a clamp jutting forward like a chin or some sort of animal tusk. These are haunted scraps, where each bit hovers in and out of being a nut or an eye, a bolt or a tooth, the series a parade of mute, mangled faces.

This exhibition is, in part, a historical corrective: Edwards was the first African-American sculptor to have a solo exhibition at the Whitney, yet this is his first solo exhibition in the UK, and only his second in Europe. All of which explains the museological feel to the selection, encompassing several representative bodies of work, spanning 1964–94. The *Rocker* series is a set of small crescent-shaped constructions on plinths, as if junkyard models for cradles or rocking

chairs. The gentle angle of the silver 'rocker' *Untitled* (c. 1971) is topped with the mesh of a steel walkway, but it's the patterned shadow underneath that exerts the main pull. *Untitled Rocker* (c. 1990) is an upside-down tilted arc of rusted steel, though its chain-lined lower lip is slightly swollen and bent upwards, giving the metal mass a sudden, unexpected fleshy tenderness. With the wider international recognition that Edwards is finally now receiving, his work also offers another kind of corrective – this is Lygia Clark gone to the American South, pinning a specificity and conscience to any lofty modernist ideals. Renewed interest in Edwards's work is timely, given the parallels between the struggles of the 1960s and the current unrest in the US, and while his approach hasn't changed, neither have the problems he sought to address. We don't need to be told that these are 'about' race, violence or struggle, as they markedly and openly carry that weight with them. *Chris Fite-Wassilak*



*Amandla*, 1981, welded steel, 58 x 19 x 27 cm.

Photo: Stephen White. © 2014 the artist / Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York.  
Courtesy Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, and Alexander Gray Associates, New York

## Jonathan Meese DR. PROST BRATWURSCHT – SHOOT YOUR DR. NO-SHOT!

(ERZ-Magical Mystery Pork Shoulder Sausage Bello-roll de Large)

Modern Art, London 28 November – 10 January

Samuel Beckett had a thought or two about the artist's social role back in 1961. 'To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now,' he said. If an encounter with Jonathan Meese's blizzard of pop memorabilia (piled high enough to provoke a sensation of claustrophobia, with a path weaving through it all) is anything to go by, Beckett was right on the money: for such encounters are a familiar experience to the seasoned gallery-goer in 2015. Not just because this kind of ramshackle pile of stuff is a recognisable motif in art right now – think installations by Thomas Hirschhorn, Song Dong or Christoph Büchel – but also because of the increasing torrent of visual information that has come to characterise living under capitalism (something upon which these artists, to generalise, are reflecting). Take a minute in Modern Art and take in the beach towels emblazoned with animals, the inflatable monkeys, aliens, birthday cakes and

SpongeBobs, fibreglass hotdogs wearing manic grins, Wendy houses, mounted moose heads, rocking horses, Bruce Lee figurines, mannequins. Put up no defence as they cascade past your eyes. See Meese's more autobiographical references: a banner scrawled with the slogan, 'We are Bayreuth' (the Bavarian city that hosts the annual opera festival that cancelled Meese's direction of Wagner's *Parsifal*, 1882, citing budget reasons, not long after the artist was unsuccessfully, and independently of the Bayreuth episode, prosecuted in 2013 for making a Nazi salute onstage at Kassel University). And the more controversial references: 'isis Love' reads another, written on a large aluminium-foil sign in the shape of the Iron Cross. Wall-hung paintings, equally messy and anarchic, surround the installation. Highly worked thick washes of paint clash with each other, occasional forms emerging from among the abstraction – weird mismade figures; a heraldic lion; a bicycle;

scrawled phrases. In the separate viewing room are more paintings of a similar ilk – only some of these have toy farm-animals trapped, encased, in the mire of thick paint.

Meese's contrarianism has a point to it. By mixing the shocking and the innocuous, he undermines the ideology that gives the former its visceral power. It's hard to take a proclamation of the Islamic State seriously when overlooked by a dumb-faced poodle with its tongue lolling. So while he is similarly giving form to the mess of visual information that we wade through every day, Meese, unlike Hirschhorn et al, boils these symbols and motifs down to their formalist qualities, flattening the political or historical hierarchies to the point of absurdity. In doing so he takes on the role of the jester, extravagantly undermining society and its ideologies through mimicry. The fool who has no desire to offer answers but slyly serves the court through mockery. Oliver Basciano



DR. PROST BRATWURSCHT – SHOOT YOUR DR. NO-SHOT!  
(ERZ-Magical Mystery Pork Shoulder Sausage Bello-roll de Large), 2014 (installation view).  
© the artist. Courtesy Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London

## Samara Scott *Harvest*

### *The Sunday Painter, London 29 November–18 January*

Stepping into the entrance corridor of the Sunday Painter, I can't help but notice a pungent minty smell – as if the gallery space itself had been forced to gargle in mouthwash. In fact it emanates from a large amount of toothpaste applied directly to the entrance wall to make up the mural *Landscape* (2014). Deposited using an impasto technique that is reminiscent of Van Gogh's landscape compositions, the lines of toothpaste are imprinted by ink transfer with undefined bits of magazine images, which together form a swirling, colourful view of a mountainous horizon. Needless to say, Samara Scott's first solo exhibition at this Peckham space is a sensuous experience, exploring both the glamorous and the obscure materiality of everyday consumer culture through a series of unconventional landscapes.

In the main gallery space the landscape is immersive. Dim spotlights fill the room with peach and fuchsia hues reminiscent of a tropical sunset, while a dozen small sculptural compositions – punctuating the gallery floor like shiny

islands in an archipelago – are highlighted by brighter lights. Presented on trays and other rectangular supports, these little islands, each showcasing unworldly landscapes in shades of pastel, emerge from the layering and fusion of food, makeup and other chemical materials, textures and smells. Hills and valleys surface from agglomerations of wet, dyed and wine-soaked toilet paper; raw spaghetti and incense sticks are planted on moist insulation-foam cottages like bare trees; elsewhere, crevasses carved in insulation foam are filled with water and food colouring, while beads of a broken necklace float in a puddle of water and nail polish.

There is something disturbingly lubricious to all the liquids and fluids running through the sculptures (hair gel and fabric softener do the job particularly well) and coalescing the different textures, which Scott emphasises in her exhibition text, evoking images 'promiscuously mating other images', and 'surfaces clambering in and out of one another'. The exhibition title, *Harvest*, also conjures up a celebration of nature,

a season often associated with ideas of fertility and abundance, but also with excess; here it becomes a metaphor for the chronic cycles of consumption and waste constitutive of consumerist culture, where desire and greed inevitably lead the way to excessive consumption, and in turn a certain nausea.

Surprisingly enough, though, Scott seems detached from any kind of statements on the social or environmental issues that stem from these capitalist patterns. Infused with a genuine Pop-like fascination with the overexposure to images and products one experiences daily, Scott attempts to capture the superficiality and artifices that lure the individual into consumption. She extracts the poetic, glamorous and mnemonic qualities from these objects and substances and, through a customised composting process, recycles them into sentimental topographies. In a digitally saturated era, Scott appeals to our senses and instincts with a multisensory experience, and it feels almost as refreshing as the Aquafresh whiff in the corridor. *Louise Darblay*



*Sorrow Cottages* (detail), 2014, insulation foam, water, spaghetti, incense sticks, electrical wiring, nail varnish, nuts, snow spray, dimensions variable.  
Courtesy the artist and the Sunday Painter, London

## Caragh Thuring

Chisenhale Gallery, London 27 November–1 February

In the land of post-Internet art and zombie abstraction, figurative painting-as-painting might have a good chance of being king again. Which is why it's hard not to like Caragh Thuring's self-consciously decelerated paintings, mostly raw linen canvases onto which shuffle bits of figurative incident, collectively giving shape to scenes that don't really want to be taken too literally, but are more curious about whether or not each sparse assembly of incongruous elements can hold together – like a pyramid of thoughtful acrobats, balancing quietly on a ball.

A number of these 13 recent works (all 2014) – most on the walls but four dangling suspended on wires – have as their pretext the artist's interest in displays of ornaments found in the windows of suburban homes in Holland. Windows are a good excuse for framing devices, as in *Self Fashioning*, in which a rough white strip contains some equally knowing panels of white, stand-ins for venetian blinds. The outlines of the pedestals of a line of vases punctuates the sill, but the vases themselves are absent patches of raw linen, although some leafy stems rise up from where two of the vases should be. A tentative pendant lampshade occupies an unconvincing space of shadow beyond.

This well-timed hesitation pushes us back, after a while, up against the possibility of never really concluding or resolving what it is we're looking at, back onto the activity of looking itself. Thuring is good at shifting the gears of our attention for us – trail off from some inconclusive drizzles of white paint in *Bush*, for example, and you find yourself looking at the suddenly fussy brushwork of the green foliage of a topiary bush. Ramping up and down from large areas of not-much to small areas of overdetailed is one of Thuring's more winning tactics here, further mangling any hope of a settled, optimum viewing distance. Throughout, Thuring trashes any remaining illusionism by using every flattening device to hand. So in *Trophy*, the bare faces and limbs of sporty women are blocked out in a brick pattern, while in *Golf*, a group of similarly debonair golf-capped brick-figures is overlaid with a chicken-wire motif (itself block-printed), while the canvas is visibly made from separately sewn strips of fabric, seams showing. *Golf* is mounted like a screen, angled from the wall beside the entrance, so you have to edge around the back of it as you enter.

This attention to the physical presence of the canvas in these latter paintings is a little

laboured, overcooking the idea that painting is more construction than representation. Thuring's staging of paintings as obstructions to viewing the gallery as a whole, meanwhile, seems to betray a nervousness about their ability to hold their ground – installation games meant to entertain us in the Chisenhale's frigid cavern of a white cube. *Map and Square Mile*, suspended back to back, have the names of London churches scrawled in graffiti-like red spraypaint, filling the canvas. The latter also has some translucent white squares added. Neither adds up to much, making some passing gesture about place and site-specificity, perhaps, but really only serving as spatial nudges to keep us moving.

The gallery notes bubble on about the 'speed at which images are consumed', as if images were junk food for our jaded visual taste buds. But painting isn't automatically better just because we chew it more slowly. And although Thuring isn't painting's answer to the Slow Food movement, a similar question arises: whether slowness and deferment are goals in their own right, or whether they are instead displacement activities for bigger problems, left unsolved and unspoken. J.J. Charlesworth



*Self Fashioning*, 2014. Commissioned by Chisenhale Gallery, London.  
Photo: Richard Ivey. Courtesy the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery, London

## Daniel Guzmán *Chromosome Damage*

*Drawing Room, London 13 December – 21 February*

*Chromosome Damage* takes its title from a 1977 song by Chrome, an American experimental rock band. In using that phrase, Daniel Guzmán continues the promiscuous citations from pop culture that date back to his early works, lifting from song lyrics and literary texts, using anything from William Burroughs to AC/DC. With the title he also nods, however, to the monstrous narratives that run through the 30 drawings of monstrous figures on display at the Drawing Room. Hung in lines across all four walls, this crowd of strange creatures reveals trajectories of mutation after a closer look. A seemingly chaotic array of subjects can be broken down into clusters of twos and threes, where the same beast sprouts new body parts, folds in upon itself or just dissolves into lumps of flesh. Sometimes human, sometimes not, often somewhere in between, each character is rendered in layers of charcoal, acrylic and pastel. Reds, browns, pinks and yellows are applied in quick strokes and washes on sheets of thin brown paper, forming what initially looks like

a collection of doodles salvaged from a classroom bin. With their obsessive focus on breasts and genitalia, the drawings are patently adolescent.

Despite their appearance, these pieces are, in fact, invested with a personal significance for their creator. Guzmán has mined his own cultural history for over a decade, and his Mexican heritage has yielded a vast symbolic vocabulary from which he continues to draw. The works in *Chromosome Damage* reference the Aztec deities of Coatlicue, Tlaltecuhtli and the Cihuatéotl, while the brown paper has a specific utilitarian function, often being used to serve street food in the Latin American country. So far, so good: Guzmán has translated the powerful goddesses of fertility, sacrifice, life and death into humble sketches on a throw-away support, capturing grand themes (even 'the matter that gives form to the universe', as the press release states) in ephemeral packages that attract and hold our attention. When the content of the drawings is probed a bit further, though, things begin to unravel. The artist's

lofty claims don't quite sit with what's on display, and the sexual politics of his works are, at best, slightly troublesome.

With their splayed limbs and exposed orifices, Guzmán's creatures are far from simply metamorphosed. Not only are they growing extra body parts, but the once-revered deities of a powerful civilisation are now bending over and taking a shit in front of us. Were this debasement and clash between high and low framed as a central feature of the exhibition, then maybe it would have made more sense. There's something to be said for delighting in the puerile, and an interesting story could be drawn from lustful teenage fantasies of one's own cultural heritage. Instead, here the female body is one in a collection of symbols, and in this mystical world it's a mass of damaged chromosomes denied full subjectivity. It becomes a tool for probing questions of existence, and in doing so, Guzmán joins a long line of artists using women as a tool to thrash out their existential angst. *Dan Udy*



*Untitled*, from the series *Chromosome Damage*, 2014, pastel, charcoal and acrylic on paper, 64 x 44 cm.  
Courtesy the artist and Kurimanzutto, Mexico City

## Dexter Dalwood *London Paintings*

Simon Lee Gallery, London 18 November–24 January

Dexter Dalwood earned his reputation at the end of the 1990s by painting the imagined homes and offices of celebrities. His works were fun and likeable, but his association with Charles Saatchi and Martin Maloney has been hard to shake off. Nonetheless, Dalwood's first show at Simon Lee, signalling a move from Gagosian Gallery (five years after his last show with them), sees him ditch completely the explicit references to celebrities to continue the more earnest and politically conscious mood of his paintings since the mid-2000s, here focusing on the gritty charms of his hometown of London.

This isn't the London of chichi coffee shops. Although the paintings – a mix of anonymous interiors and iconic landmarks – are dated 2013 and 2014, they seem nostalgic for a time when the city was rougher around the edges. There are two scenes from cult music venues, both still riding today on their legendary reputations. *Roundhouse* (2014), zooming in on a corner of a stage set, as if we were pushed up against it during a gig, is bathed in blood-red tones; *Heaven* (2013) depicts the exit corridor of the famous nightclub, looking into the black void of the club interior dotted with indeterminate whitish streaks – maybe people, maybe disco lights. The peculiar angles and

hallucinatory vibe suggests fragments from hazy personal memories.

Four paintings depicting details of domestic interiors in different parts of the capital underscore the transient nature of bohemian London living. The evocative addresses of their titles hint at the greater cultural history of the city. Powis Square in Notting Hill, for example, was made famous as the set of the cult 1970 film *Performance*. In Dalwood's *Powis Square* (2014), there is a suggestion of a figure at the bottom of the lofty room; a Francis Bacon-esque play on cropping, volume and psychological intrigue. It's the only clear sign of life in any of these interiors; elsewhere, our imagination and memories must fill in the human element.

Dalwood has previously assumed the role of obsessed celebrity fan, and here he continues the game of asking us to spot pop-cultural and art-historical references that appear sometimes as quotes, at other times as familiar painting techniques or moods. London's history of painters merges here with London itself. He is clearly attracted to British Pop, as represented by the likes of Patrick Caulfield and David Hockney; also the dark, psychologically charged works of Whistler and Bacon. Two Thames scenes, *Old Thames* and *The Thames Below Waterloo* (both 2014),

recall Whistler's London nocturnes and Monet's paintings of Waterloo Bridge respectively, while in the latter a patch of LA-swimming-pool-blue water – complete with the top of a pool ladder – unexpectedly references Hockney.

The mix of memory and art history means that the works defy pinning down to a particular time. *1989* (2014), the back end of the horse from the George IV statue on Trafalgar Square, is the only painting for which we are given a specific historical date to consider. The year 1989 is when the Poll Tax riots took place on Trafalgar Square, effectively marking the end of Thatcherism and a brief moment of victory for Londoners against an unwanted government policy. In Dalwood's cheeky version (he first depicted the Poll Tax protests in a 2005 painting), the horse looks a little too realistic, as if it might walk off the plinth or dump some steaming manure. It's these sparks of unexpected references, disjointed elements and punky humour that add interest to Dalwood's superficially simple work. If his celebrity interiors were always more concerned with his – and indeed our own – fantasies than with the famous people themselves, this portrait of London gives us insight into Dalwood's influences and youthful nostalgias. Jennifer Thatcher



*Roundhouse*, 2014, oil on canvas, 150 x 220 cm.  
Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, London

## Agnieszka Polska *IAm the Mouth*

Nottingham Contemporary 17 October–4 January

What might seven avant-garde conceptual twentieth-century artists, each associated with disappearing from the artworld (through choice or circumstance) do in the afterlife, where it's not just 'art' that they have been disconnected from, but 'life'? One answer to this is *Future Days* (2013), one of five new and recent short films by Polish artist Agnieszka Polska. In the future of *Future Days* the Swedish island of Gotland stands in for the underworld, where the protagonists (Paul Thek, Jerzy Ludwiński, Włodzimierz Borowski, Lee Lozano, Charlotte Posenenske and Andrzej Szewczyk, each portrayed by an actor in a semilifelike latex mask) amble about the more remote parts of the island, encountering similarly 'departed' artworks – Robert Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970), Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking* (1967) – while musing on their situation. The dialogue is a bit clunky, the artists are kind of zombies after all, but their predicament throws up pertinent questions touched on in all these films: what

does creative absence mean and how do we, the living, construct and perpetuate mythologies about people and events from the past?

Pawel Freisler, another 'disappeared' artist, is at the centre of *The Garden (Gardener's Responsibility)* (2010), having supposedly withdrawn from the artworld in the 1970s to take up gardening. Using a mix of filmed and archive horticultural footage, Polska reimagines Freisler as the film's unseen narrator, explaining the ecosystem of his garden. A reimagined event is also the focus of *How the Work Is Done* (2011), a 1956 student occupation at Kraków's Academy of Fine Arts. This creative absence is the students' labour, alluded to by simple animations of chopping, sawing and chiselling, the use of animation a nod to Poland's art-historical associations with the medium.

This interest in pseudo-documentary, constructed memory and material properties historically aligns Polska with the work of Chris Marker, and contemporarily Duncan Campbell

and to a lesser extent Elizabeth Price and Jane and Louise Wilson, without perhaps quite the sophistication. But when Polska shifts the focus more towards ambiguities of understanding in visual imagery, verbal language and science, she comes into her own. The pair of disembodied red lips that repeats soothing refrains in *IAm the Mouth II* (2014) refers to the brain-soothing effects of banal words and actions caused by the odd Internet phenomenon of ASMR (Auto Sensory Meridian Response) videos. In *Watery Rhymes* (2014), commissioned for this show, Polska creates, in effect, a science-based pop promo, layering written text, music, animation and archive images that respond to the inability of quantum physics to be expressed in ordinary language. Viewed together, what Polska's films seem to be saying is that the past is as in flux as the present, that conceptual art is as much about storytelling and language as it is about ideas, and that the most legitimate activity for an artist may be to stop making art. *Helen Sumpter*



*Future Days* (film still), 2013, HD video, 29 min 30 sec.  
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Źak/Branicka, Berlin

## Robert Olsen *Paintings from 1997–2014*

*Luckman Fine Arts Complex, Los Angeles 8 November–20 December*

Los Angeles artist Robert Olsen passed away in his sleep from a heart condition at the age of forty-four in April 2014, leaving behind a body of work that was a testament to discipline and simple diligence. Olsen would draw the same object for weeks, if not months, posting his drawings on a blog and then working the drawings slowly into oils. Popular subjects included oranges, Moleskine notebooks, cinderblocks, bus stops and glowing commercial signs. Most of his paintings concerned Los Angeles at night, close studies of bright highlights against pitch-black backgrounds.

Olsen's images are sharp and isolated, sometimes thrown into the harsh glare of a spotlight or apparently, at times, glowing from within. The direction and source of light was an obsession for Olsen, and he felt that he could best study light in its absence on empty streets. Many considered Olsen LA's resident Edward Hopper, a man who showed us the underside

of urban living, the shadows of industry at the end of day. Olsen's images are always plainspoken but incredibly tense. The tension in waiting for a traffic light to turn from red to green could, in Olsen's world, pivot quickly to a metaphor for free-floating and unmoored anxiety.

A 20 x 48 cm oil from 2009, *Lemon Within a Very Long Rind*, has the type of brilliant finish and deep shadow that mark the still lifes of Zurbarán and other Spaniards, a tradition often intent on virtuosity and showy articulation that can dazzle with detail. Olsen plays to this level of artistry, but his lemon painting is not simply a display of artistic mastery; it is a meditation on the fleeting nature of such perfections. A second later, it seems, the fruit will be in decline, but in the painting it is held in the grace of its present moment. There is something about that long, twisting rind, the dance from glow to dark across its surface, that makes this painting, like the legacy of *memento mori* on which it draws,

a testament to the false dream of immortality.

There can be false notes in Olsen's work – as when he lifted the veil of LA, perhaps more than he should have, in Weegee-type scenes of crimes or S&M. Olsen was too curious, too in awe of the contours and subtleties of darkness, to need this sort of overt, active lonely content. Instead, he was most at home with the poetry one can find in the leftovers of parties or the enigmas of capitalism when its cash registers are closed for the night.

In the feverish landscape of contemporary art, Olsen could hide in plain sight, mounting a show each year, and never receiving much acclaim. In an artworld that measures value by the metre, his paintings were contained within a matter of centimetres and needed no more to make an impact. It is a pity Olsen is not better known. At their modest, reserved best, Olsen's paintings connect to the deepest strains of history, while staying relevant to how we live right now. *Ed Schad*



*Station*, 2009, gesso on canvas over panel, 28 x 67 cm. Photo: Michael Underwood.  
Courtesy Luckman Fine Arts Complex at Cal State L.A., Los Angeles

## Alma Allen

*Blum & Poe, Los Angeles 10 January – 28 February*

An artist like Alma Allen causes certain categorical predicaments for those who try to write about the extraordinary objects he has been quietly making for over two decades. He is a self-taught artist who is far from Outsider, a craftsman who makes furniture as well as functionless objects, an artist who in 2013 was plying his trade at the Echo Park Craft Fair and in 2014 was lauded as a highlight of the Whitney Biennial, and a private figure whose troubled backstory adds gravitas to his outwardly quixotic creations.

The press release for this, Allen's first exhibition with Blum & Poe and his first solo show in several years, wastes no time before rehashing his mythology: 'A teenage runaway without a high school degree, the self-taught artist began an initial period of intense hand carving using salvaged materials while often homeless.' Admittedly, it is a terrific story – how Allen was so desperately poor that he sold knickknacks on the streets of SoHo, New York, during the 1990s, and was lucky

enough to be taken under the wing of some artworld tastemakers.

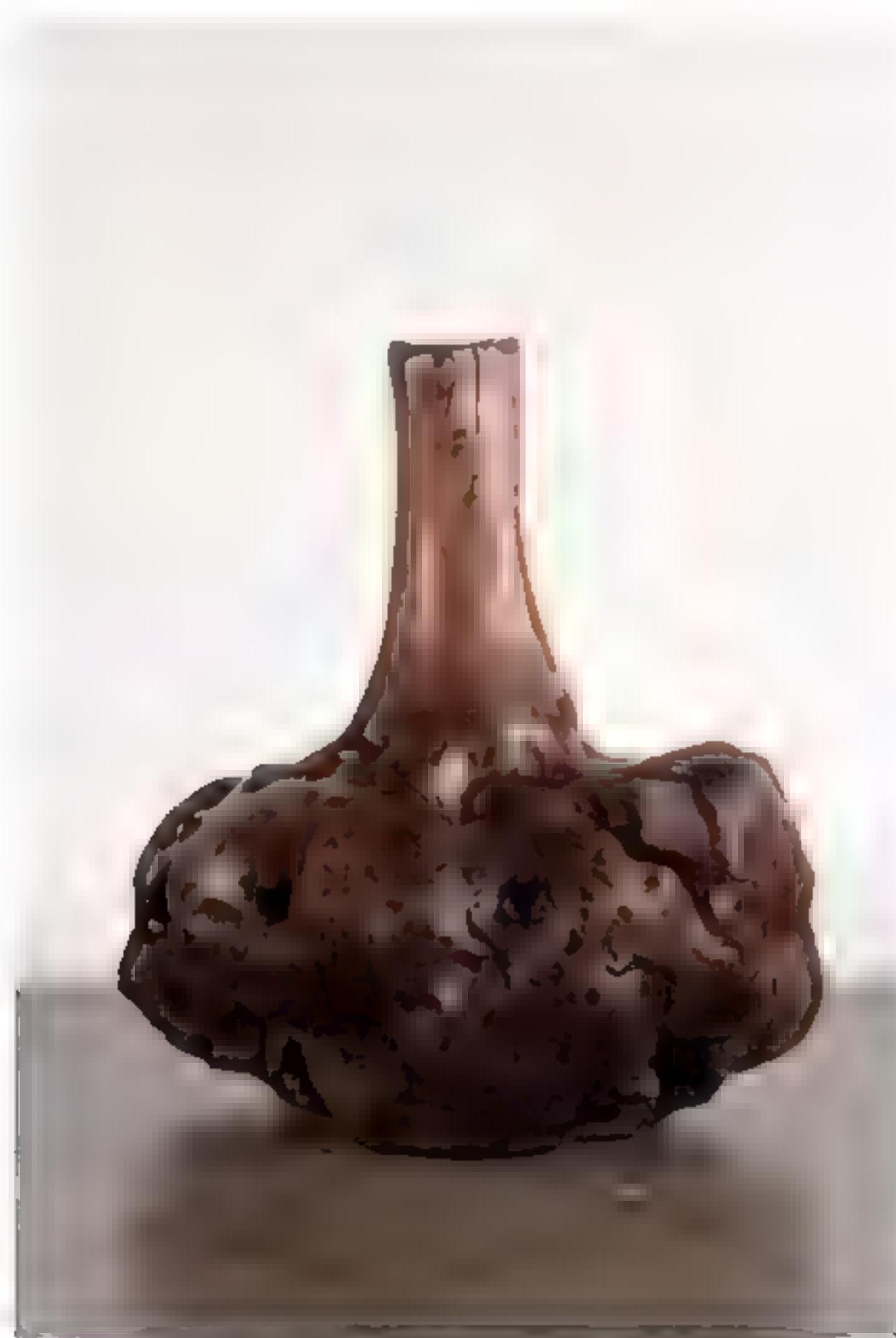
Putting the legend before the work, however, does Allen a great disservice, because at his best he is an artist capable of making sculptures that are singularly off-kilter and uncanny. Made with a combination of digital and manual processes, his artworks may look at first like the freakish spawn of nature: smooth lumps of driftwood, perhaps, or pieces of eroded rock, or unlikely fossils. But then odd details like a circular plug sticking out of a hunk of leathery Claro walnut or two neat pegs protruding from an undulating wedge of white marble dispatch all notions of naturalness and reveal them to be calculatedly manmade. Like the famous laboratory mouse with a human ear growing on its back, these sculptures can seem just plain wrong, and brilliantly so. They are aberrations from science fiction rather than empathic expressions of organic materiality.

Others, however, land too squarely (for my taste) on the side of formal satisfaction and

balance. This exhibition could gainfully be edited to produce a much more dynamic artistic statement. But here's part of the puzzle with Allen: it's by no means clear exactly what he wants to say with these objects. My suspicion is that he is mainly happy to make them, and to have people buy them when he is done. All these objects are listed as 'Not Yet Titled' – the titling, apparently, to be done by their eventual owners.

If works of art are, as Arthur Danto has it, embodied meanings, then Allen's diffidence in claiming his stake in the creation of those meanings might give us pause. Is it terribly old-fashioned even to ask if these objects are indeed art, in Danto's definition? I don't think so – not because of hierarchical reasons (I would argue, anyway, that a good piece of craft is worth more than a bad piece of art) but because that distinction tells us how much we can expect from the object we're looking at, and the terms on which it can succeed and fail.

Jonathan Griffin



*Not Yet Titled*, 2014, walnut, 99 x 89 x 77 cm.  
Courtesy the artist and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles

## Diana Thater *Science, Fiction*

David Zwirner, New York 8 January – 21 February

*Science, Fiction*, Diana Thater's newest video installation, which features appearances by the Milky Way and dung beetles and an oblique nod to the artistic activities from the 1960s that we associate with the term Light and Space, sounds far more compelling than it actually is.

Just how do these things touch on one another? A 2013 paper in *Current Biology* established that dung beetles – at least a species of ball-rolling dung beetles named *Scarabaeus satyrus* (about which it is a mystery why more art isn't made) – use the Milky Way to navigate. Dung beetles are already known to use the sun, the moon and – to my mind the more compelling feat – the celestial polarisation pattern to navigate their way around the dung heap, but this was the first time that the Milky Way, visible as a gradient of celestial light that stripes our night sky, was proven to offer the beetles a means of orientation, particularly since it's visible when the moon is not. To test this ability, a team of South African biologists set up their beetle arena inside the Johannesburg Planetarium, which allowed them to conveniently turn the Milky Way on and off. When on, the beetles got moving in straighter lines than when just a field of dim or even a handful of bright stars were projected. QED.

Around this bit of experimental resourcefulness Thater has constructed a two-part

installation: for one part, two nine-screen arrays of monitors, set on opposite walls, capture the celestial lightshow of the planetarium that belongs to the Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles. Named, respectively, *The Starry Messenger* and *Sidereus Nuncius* (all works 2014), the English and Latin titles of Galileo's first astronomical treatise on observations made with the assistance of a telescope, Thater's arrays show the slow rotation of the night sky beyond the ominous spherical head of the planetarium's stationary star projector. The scene will immediately call to mind the establishing shots of any number of science-fiction films set in outer space, the chasm between that celestial curtain and whatever little bit of technology the characters depend upon for survival providing the very conditions of possibility for not just whatever dramatic action is to come but also the fearful limits of our understanding (for which aliens of all sorts serve as allegories). The simplicity with which Thater is able to stage this twentieth-century filmic ur-scene is a testament to her talents; that the room in which we watch the screens is bathed in a blue-quasi-black light, supposedly meant to replicate skylight at dusk, means she is not immune to overreach.

For the other part, Thater has built a room-size box that gives off yellow light below and projects a closeup of dung beetles at work onto

the gallery's ceiling above. Why the architectural intervention? Though one doubts it's Thater's guiding rationale, with a projection of shit on the ceiling, perhaps it's better that one can't get right underneath it to watch.

Putting images of the dung beetle's earth-bound enterprise in the place where one would expect to see images of the sky is a rote kind of reversal; one would expect it of a BFA student and not from someone of Thater's intelligence. And that's the general problem with *Science, Fiction*: it chases after big ideas – art historical, astronomical, biological – and wants to weave them together across scales measured by orders of magnitude, but doesn't manage to get a hold of them in the first place. Should we marvel at the way the modestly small has coevolved with the unfathomably large? Is it tragic that the electrical illumination of the world threatens the nighttime orders of nature? Does the planetarium model for us some future when images of our 'outside' are all we will have to experience? The answers here are yes, yes and no. Better than religion, science has always projected its unknown, which is fundamentally a figural if not a representational category, and hence the province of fictions of all sorts. But what the unknown, the 'outside', possesses, ultimately, and which *Science, Fiction* does not, is gravity.

Jonathan T.D. Neil



*Science, Fiction*, 2015 (installation view).  
Courtesy David Zwirner, New York & London

## Rashaad Newsome *Legends, Statements, Stars* Marlborough Gallery, New York 9 December–3 January

It's hard to tell if the work in this exhibition is *supposed* to be hideous or if it's unintentionally so. The line is thin, if not entirely porous. Many of the works look like they were sourced from a junkshop in southern Florida, or from the halls of some McMansion once filled to the brim with leopard skins, mirrored ceilings and bad taste. This is the point, to a large degree, as Newsome's meticulous collages play with the attraction of ostentatious materialism. They're inspired by medieval heraldry and cathedral architecture as seen through the lens of twenty-first-century hip-hop. But Newsome belabours the point, pushing it to such a degree that it triggers one's gag reflex. I mean, his frames have strips of fake fur attached to them. In *Rapture* (2013) the frame is clung to by flying cherubs, while in *Turn Up* (2013) Newsome covers it in leather and gold. Were they commissioned by Cher? It's like he drove a party bus lined in carpet and Christmas lights uptown and raped the medium of painting with it. While I'm a fan of undermining painterly conventions, Newsome's attempt is so heavy-handed it hurts.

As if literalising Derridean, postmodernist theory, Newsome makes it hard to even talk

about his works without talking about their frames, which are arguably more the work than the work itself. All antique, they have been customised by the artist so as to become a parody of Old Master frames, the kind that wrap around a Titian, say, and manage to be both opulent and restrained all at once. But restrained Newsome's frames are not. The one surrounding *Hey Papi* (2011) features three-dimensional plastic Calla lilies poking out from corners knotted with garish green filigree, and long strips of fake fur line its sides. As for the collage itself, it's composed almost entirely of diamond imagery found in magazines, painstakingly cut out and arranged into a repeating diamond grid revolving around a picture of a buxom but headless woman at its centre. She's gripping her bra as if to keep her massive tits from falling out all over the place. This is the kind of female figure found in many a music video, jiggling alongside a Ferrari in a G-string and heels as a bunch of dudes in chains stand by. The scene is sort of repeated in *Saints and Centers 2* (2014), except here there are only the most perfect of lips, surrounded by a floating armature of diamond necklaces and big, colourful baubles.

If Newsome's intention is to foreground capital's gendered power structures and obsessive consumerism, it's unclear whether he loathes it or loves it. Sometimes that tension can be productive, but at the expense of sounding like a cranky Marxist, here it's simply repulsive.

Most problematic, however, is the video *ICON* (2014), which portrays young queers and transgenders of all stripes voguing in a simulated computer environment as reductively artificial as the foliage decorating the frame of *Wild Magnolia* (2013) nearby. There's something distinctly tasteless about featuring the long-marginalised ballroom community, yet again, in these hushed midtown digs – it smacks of exploitation. Moreover, *ICON* doesn't really say anything new or contribute much to the discourse surrounding the community's class codes and stylised lexicon. This is indicative of the exhibition as a whole, which seems like a missed opportunity to complicate and challenge its subject matter, particularly since it's shown in such extremes. You'd think there'd be more of a point.

David Everitt Howe



*Wild Magnolia*, 2013, collage in customised antique frame, 183 x 178 x 18 cm.  
© the artist. Courtesy Marlborough Gallery, New York

## Kara Walker *Afterword*

### *Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York 21 November–17 January*

The most-written-about New York exhibition of 2014 must surely have been Kara Walker's monumental site-specific installation *A Subtlety* (to compress its extremely long full title), for which a gigantic, Africanised white-sugar-coated sphinx dominated the disused and decomposing Domino Sugar Factory in Brooklyn, accompanied, or perhaps attended to, by smaller, child-worker statues dripping with molasses. Not content to leave all subsequent comment on this to the bloggers, journalists and art writers, Walker's recent exhibition of preparatory drawings, sculptural remnants and short films is, as the exhibition title has it, the artist's *Afterword*.

It was less *A Subtlety* itself that provided the main topic of others' critical comments, but more so the audience's mode of mediated looking, self-imaging and online sharing. In reaction to the massive digital proliferation of selfies that were being taken in front of the sphinx, for the final hour of the final day of its exhibition last July, Walker asked six cameramen to film, as *Afterword*'s wall text puts it, viewers

'in the act of looking – at the work, at themselves, at one another, and especially looking at their phones and cameras'. The outcome, a carefully edited but free-flowing 27-minute film, *An Audience* (2014), may not be the final word on the near viral digital dispersal of *A Subtlety*, but it represents a forceful attempt to reclaim some sense of the work's enigmatic strangeness from its asinine online presence.

Beginning outside the factory site, a camera follows a black woman accompanied by her two young children amid throngs of viewers marching toward the factory space. A large warning notice guarding against touching the artwork prefigures the intense, almost compulsive technologised looking soon seen within.

Before the full carnival of audience imaging begins to unfold, the first few sequences demonstrate, almost didactically, a clear contrast between unguarded and ambiguous emotional reactions to the work – awe, confusion, discomfort – and the cool affectless activity of the photographers. It is as if the latter functions as a defence against the former, as if the sickly sweet horror

of Walker's installation generates a need for such psychical protection.

Walker's choice of watercolour for the preparatory sketches, a popular colonial-era medium used by tourists seeking to capture picturesque scenes, has both historical significance and contemporary parallels. The widely prevalent vernacular imaging of the past is connected directly, in at least one sketch, *Progeny* (2014), to the contemporary scenes of self-imaging seen in *An Audience*. This blood-red watercolour shows a decapitated sphinx with a diminutive figure resembling one of the attendant sculptures, but now shown holding up a camera phone.

If *An Audience* conjures up similar parallels between past and present, the imaginative range of viewer reactions – from vulnerability to bold self-assertion to cautious curiosity – is perhaps stranger even than the fevered scenes of violence, reverence and horror seen in the watercolour sketches. I wonder if Walker might still be surprised at the footage from that final hot July day. *Siona Wilson*



*Untitled*, 2013, ink and watercolour on paper, from a set of eight, dimensions variable.  
© the artist. Courtesy Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York

## Robert Gober *The Heart Is Not a Metaphor*

MOMA, New York 4 October–18 January

Few, if any, artists have delved so trenchantly into the existential hypocrisy of latter-day America – the creed of equality masking ingrained racism, sexism and homophobia; sanctimonious conservative mores belied by an adolescentlike indulgence in drugs and too-often-predatory sex; the consumption of schlock trumpeted as the world's highest middle-class standard of living – as Mike Kelley and Robert Gober, both sons of 1950s Catholic families of modest means. Kelley, in his reenactments of high school pageants, photos of naked adults soiling stuffed animals and of his own acne-inflamed teenage face, and drawings of garbage dumps, strips away such constructed veneers of innocence and convention to reveal the ghastly sadism, tackiness and personal insecurity that define formation in, at least, baby-boomer American culture. In contrast, Gober's puzzling, reticent objects and installations – both he and Kelley are masters of the latter form – at once present the veneer and pierce it.

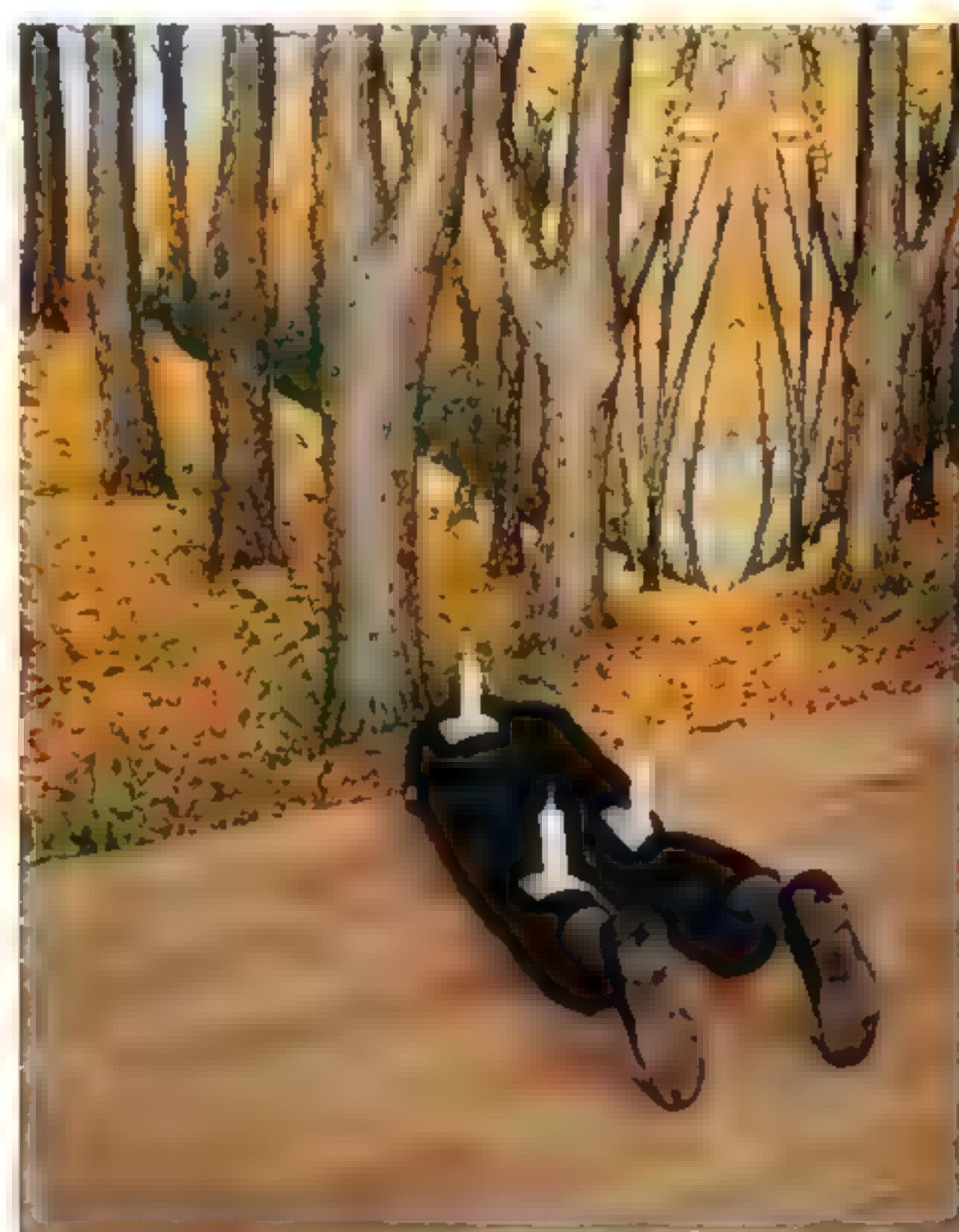
In his replica boxes of rat bait and the bags of cat litter, for example, he works with objects

that control the filth Kelley indulges, and in his pewter drains embedded in gallery walls, ones that facilitate transitions between home and sewer, he offers up states of suspended identity (such as the sinks that lack taps and piping, which seem lifted from some enigmatic, unfolding ritual). He posits the human condition as an equivalence between the creations of the mind and of the gut, most potently in *Untitled* (1990), a waxwork of naked buttocks printed with a musical score and punctuated by a light brown hole. He gives us plaster, paint, wood, cast crystal, etc, all the materials precisely listed on the wall labels, which have been made to look like something else entirely – hairy candles, *trompe l'oeil* plywood, submerged bodies – through his meticulous craft.

Gober does not aim to create metaphors. As signalled by the show's title, he attempts to realise the physical and spiritual embodiment of the heart; or, given his frequent use of Catholic imagery, an artistic version of the dictum 'God is Love'. Just as the host transcends the immediate, physical world, his

pieces exist simultaneously in the here of the viewer and in a dimension defined by the care and content he vests in his work: the fragility of childhood, the status of same-sex attraction, the nature of intimacy, all themes that suggest love as he envisions it and thus how society perverts it.

Heavily reliant on personal references, as suggested by the exceptionally detailed chronology that comprises the better part of the exhibition catalogue and that edges into hagiographic minutiae, his art nevertheless often – and in this dense exhibition, quickly – becomes recondite and overly baroque, as in, say, *Untitled* (2012), an inverted sink, the backsplash of which mimics driftwood woven with human limbs. In other cases it can be overly obvious, as with *Untitled* (1994–5), a fireplace filled with children's legs. But Gober's chronology also suggests the marvellous specificity of an individual life, and particularly in his sinks and cribs, he evokes the body and its absence in ways that remain evocative, mysterious and almost transcendent. *Joshua Mack*



*Untitled*, 1994–5, wood, beeswax, brick, plaster, plastic, leather, iron, charcoal, cotton socks, electric light and motor, 120 × 119 × 86 cm.  
Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, on permanent loan to the Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel.  
Photo: D. James Dee. © the artist. Courtesy the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

## Susan Philipsz *Part File Score* Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York 8 January–14 February

Hanns Eisler (1898–1962) was one of the first artists blacklisted by the House Un-American Activities Committee. The Jewish Austrian composer left Europe for the United States in 1938, escaping the Nazis, and was deported in 1948 for suspected communist activities. Eisler's FBI file is available on the bureau's website. Its 686 pages of typewritten notes are almost all redacted, evidence of the fear and suspicion that the celebrated composer, who was nominated for two Oscars for Hollywood film compositions, was a communist informant.

Eisler is the subject of *Part File Score* (2014), a 12-speaker soundwork in which Susan Philipsz deconstructs three of Eisler's compositions for film: music for Walter Ruttmann's *Opus III* (1924); the piece Eisler is best known for, *Fourteen Ways to Describe Rain* (1941), which replaced the original soundtrack to *Regen* (1929), a silent film by Joris Ivens; and a retrospective score for Charlie Chaplin's *The Circus* (1928), which Eisler began to develop in 1947, but never finished because he had to leave the US. In Philipsz's hands, these musical works are trimmed down

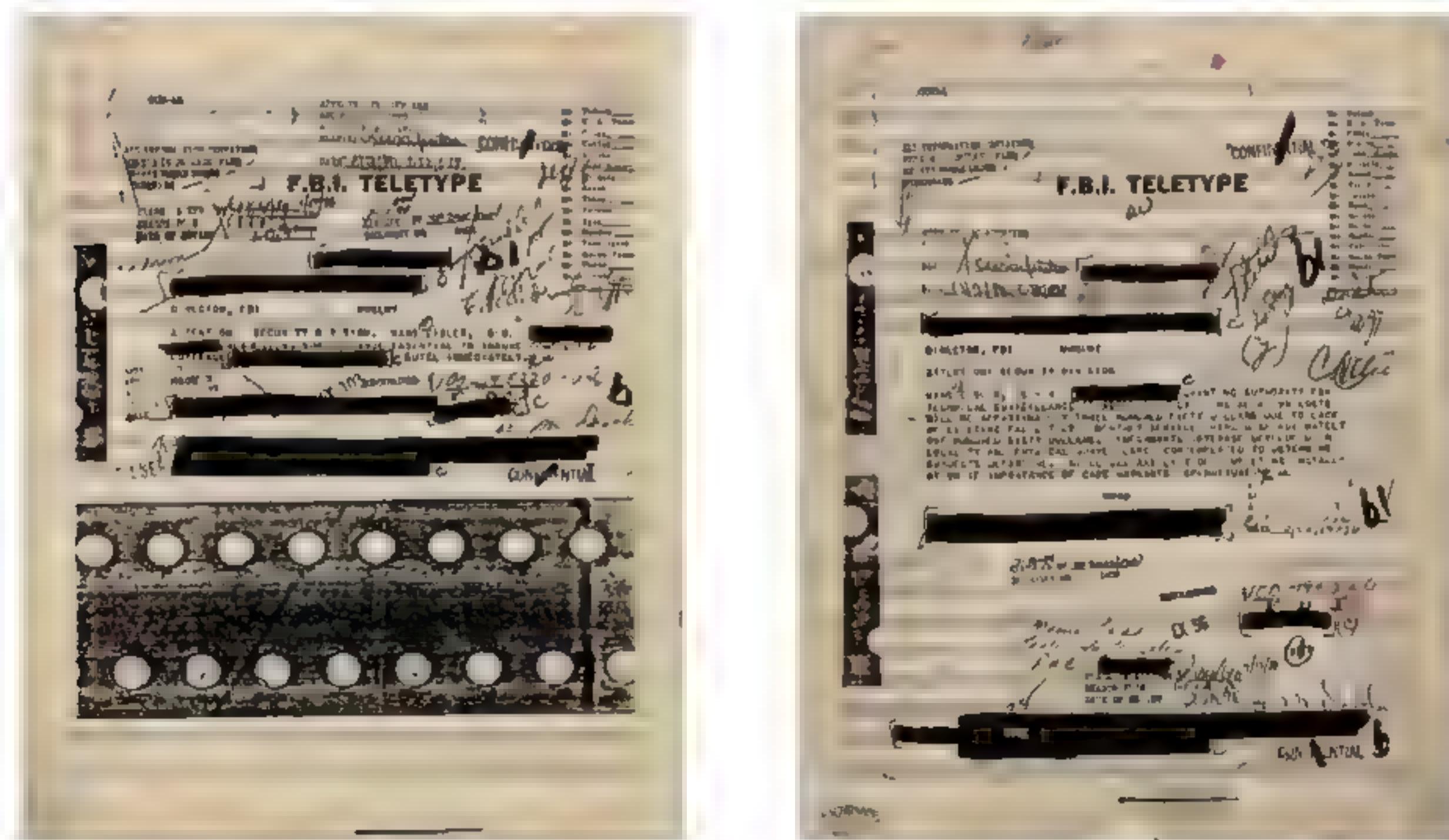
to a single violin, with each note playing on a different speaker. The speakers are suspended from the ceiling to reach the audience's eye and ear level. Walking through the space, one cannot stitch together the distinct, individuated sounds into some unified whole. The compound music is intermittent, fractured, and so reflects not only on the life of Philipsz's subject but also the general atmosphere of anxiety and fear that pervaded the US during the Cold War.

On the gallery walls Philipsz displays 11 digital reproductions of Eisler's FBI records superimposed over his musical scores. The large framed prints include details from the composer's life, such as a list of Eisler's acquaintances, including T.W. Adorno, 'Bert' Brecht, Chaplin and Fritz Lang (the name of a person who worked for the Bell Telephone company was erased), as well as letters, internal FBI memos and other ephemera, all printed over Eisler's scores, which are hand-worked and full of erasures and additions.

The prints are remarkable for the level of detail they reveal about Eisler's story, but also because they reverberate so strongly today.

In light of Edward Snowden's leak of the US National Security Agency's illegal wiretapping and the way that these revelations have changed the discourse surrounding government-sponsored surveillance and the right to privacy, the aesthetic of these prints – the redactions, the stamps reading 'Confidential' and 'FBI Teletype' – is chillingly contemporary.

As with *Study for Strings* (2012), Philipsz's site-specific installation at the Kassel train station for Documenta 13, for which she reworked a composition written in the Theresienstadt concentration camp by the Jewish Czech composer Pavel Haas, here Philipsz shows once again that she is at her best when working with historical material. Her treatment of sound, already a visceral element, which she breaks apart or brings back to a space from which it was drained, offers a substantial emotional experience. It's never didactic and always contemporary. Hers is not an art of great gestures: it's the work of slowly chipping away at history, exposing something that is both a mesmerising tribute and a lesson for today. *Orit Gat*



*Part File Score III*, 2014, digital print and silkscreen print on canvas,  
189 × 150 × 4 cm (framed), edition of 3 + 2APS.  
Courtesy the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York

## Yael Bartana

*Petzel Gallery, New York 8 January – 14 February*

In her second solo exhibition at Petzel Gallery, Israeli Yael Bartana explores two types of identity – national and religious. The show consists of two irrelevant photographic works, one neon light installation that reads 'Black Stars Shed No Light' and two films, *Inferno* (2013) and *True Finn* (2014). These last two are the only works that warrant any attention. Unfortunately, the questions they raise are ones that anyone with a halfway decent education has probably already considered, rendering them more entertaining than critical.

In *True Finn*, which is the former name of Finland's ethnic nationalist Finns Party, eight citizens gather for a week in a remote cabin to discuss the question, 'Who is a true Finn?' To the viewer, it looks less like an actual summit and more like a Christopher Guest mockumentary. Footage of the subjects – who include Mustafe, a Muslim man born in Somalia, Tiina, a Roma woman wearing Gypsy garb, and Komugi, a deadpan Japanese woman – is sutured together with grainy imagery of reindeer and people sitting in saunas, pitting the 'new' Finland against the old. Intelligent discussions of national

identity are undercut by ridiculous workshops that include creating a new Finnish flag, jumping together on an imaginary trampoline and electing a 'True Finn' from the group – an honour that subverts the former name of the country's ethnic nationalist party. That title goes to the dark-skinned Mustafe, because the group generally agrees that he is a good friend and makes good conversation. In other words, modern Finnish identity is based not on appearance or shared history, but on good vibes.

Religious identity is explored in *Inferno*, a 22-minute video that follows a joyous bunch of gorgeous young Brazilians, all clad in white gauze outfits and Carmen Miranda headdresses, who make a pilgrimage to the Temple of Solomon in São Paulo. In the temple, they encounter an evil drag queen with kohl-rimmed eyes – a high priest in this scenario. They all make the Roc-A-Fella diamond sign in front of a gilded replica of the Ark of the Covenant, and then the floor opens up beneath them, dragging some worshippers into the depths of Hades. Those left alive stagger bloodied out into the city. In some

future time, the scene of this tragedy is transformed into a holy site à la the Wailing Wall, drawing parallels with Jerusalem. Bartana calls it a 'historical pre-enactment'.

Light Internet research reveals that the Brazilian Temple of Solomon is not a fiction but an actual site that houses the congregation of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), an evangelical church founded in Rio de Janeiro in the 1970s. In recent years, the UCKG has been mired in accusations of money laundering (its founder, Edir Macedo, is estimated to be worth over \$1 billion, allegedly from tithes collected from desperately poor members). In creating a mockup of the temple for her set, Bartana superimposes the pageantry of an ancient religion on the site of a modern one and so draws a comparison between Judaism and the UCKG. Really? The transference of symbolism from one belief system to another is older than the alphabet and in this context says nothing about the people who follow them. *Inferno* is a pretty film for sure, but it has about as much depth as a national anthem. Brienne Walsh

## Yael Bartana

*Captain Petzel, Berlin 23 January – 28 February*

In her first Berlin exhibition at Captain Petzel, Yael Bartana is showing two newer films, *Inferno* (2013) and *True Finn* (2014). The story of *Inferno* is quick to tell: a replica of Solomon's Temple is built in São Paulo by an evangelical church; 'original' stones are even flown in from Israel. During the ostentatious inauguration ceremony, the temple unexpectedly collapses. Yael Bartana depicts its destruction – only a single foundation-wall remains – and the death of the young and emphatically 'beautiful' believers in the spectacular style of a Hollywood action film. In the end there is but one recourse: the use of the ruins by the tourism industry. Once again, the artist provocatively combines fictional historical narrative and prophetic criticism in this 22-minute video, but ultimately fails to exploit productively – ie, in terms of ideological criticism – the power of the counterfactual, which is usually a strength of her work. This glamorous video weaves its story too simply.

*Inferno* is shown in the main exhibition space – which the curators have gone to great length to appoint as a 'black cube' – while the projection of *True Finn* is somewhat tucked away in the

cellar. This is a curious decision, as *True Finn* is far and away the more complex and more interesting work. The 50-minute video shows eight Finnish citizens as they gather at a typical Finnish wooden house in a lonely, snow-covered Finnish landscape. An open call conducted by the artist culminated in the protagonists spending seven days under one roof, eating together, going to the sauna, fishing, collecting wood and, above all, debating. The reason for their gathering is as follows. The eight exceedingly different characters of differing ages, differing beliefs and differing origins are to address the question: 'Who is a true Finn?' At stake in *True Finn* is the idea of 'national identity', its problematic history, contradictory present and precarious future in a globalised world. In the course of finding answers to the question posed, not only do the protagonists discuss for days on end the strained relationship between individuality and community, they also design a new Finnish flag. In so doing, they reflect upon the problem of representing national identity: which colour symbolises which typical Finnish trait, and are these traits

not ultimately a more or less trite simplification? In the same vein at a later workshop, the eight Finns also write a new national anthem, which they sing – in traditional folkloric garb – at the end of the video. This part of *True Finn* is conceived as documentary-style reality TV. The protagonists' selection among themselves of the 'True Finn of the Week' parodies this popular genre. Bartana interrupts the staging of this reality TV show with short, pertinent excerpts from old Finnish films, in which, for instance, the difficult life story of a Roma living in Finland alternates with the mythological tale of a woman who transforms into a white reindeer. With *True Finn* – the title is a play on the name of a rightwing populist party in Finland – the artist succeeds in creating a multilayered reflection on the theme of nationalism, which asks many questions but consistently avoids giving answers. And in this case she relies not on loud provocation but on sensitive, thoughtful chords. As such, the exhibition reveals two sides of Bartana's work, the ultimate effect of which is something like two sides of the same coin. Raimar Stange

*Translated from the German by Jonathan Lutes*



from top *True Finn* (film still), 2014, HD video, 50 min;  
*Inferno* (film still), 2013, Alexa camera transferred to HD, 22 min

both Courtesy the artist; Petzel Gallery, New York; Captain Petzel, Berlin; Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam; and Sommer Contemporary, Tel Aviv

## Richard Hawkins

Galerie Buchholz, Berlin 27 November–24 January

Richard Hawkins's art might be summarised as fissures of tightly packed imagery in the midst of devil-may-care gesturalism. This binary interlocks as an emblem of the dynamics of desire. Photographic detail shows the brush what it is questing towards. Abstraction breaks its introversion to reach after a fetish object – a young Matt Dillon, for example – that is interchangeable with a fetishised art object: an Acropolis sculpture of a naked boy.

Exhibiting an early 26-page collage series (*Still Ill: An Illuminating Manuscript*, 1984) alongside new paintings, Hawkins renders this dynamic retrospective, self-reflexive; ironically, because *Still Ill* makes the act of drawing a metaphor for onanism. In 2002, he wrote, 'My daily routine consists of painting in the morning for a few hours and then going back to bed for a long, leisurely stroll through some Brazilian she-male porn. I'm not sure that the former informs the latter, but the latter certainly does inform the former.'

*Still Ill* diversifies blocks of stream-of-consciousness handwriting with a leaf or a Post-It note, and Polaroids of gay porn. On sheets the size of a broadsheet newspaper, and of a yellowishness that now looks like a sign for age, the writing switches from horizontal to diagonal to spiral formations with a testosterone-fuelled inventiveness. One heading reads, 'RELENTLESS, INEFFECTUAL, ANGUISH-RIDDEN BULLSHIT WITH NO PURPOSE BUT SELF-AFFLICTION

AND NO MEANING OUTSIDE THE PAIN IT CAUSES ITS MAKER', but quoting seems beside the point: the texts accumulate into a uniform monologuing buzz that corresponds with their visual reduction to a monotone setting for the porn vignettes. Consistently, it is pathetic, beseeching, as self-dramatising as it is self-lacerating, wrestling with the demons of ennui, alienation and sexual frustration.

These were the emotional touchstones of early-1980s postpunk (much of which had gay undercurrents), hence the title of the series, referencing a track from the Smiths' great self-titled debut album of 1984. It has never occurred to me how onanistic that title was, given Morrissey's romanticising of the self as a closed but yearning shell of sexual longing. The simultaneity of a cultural reference and a personal testament is typical of Hawkins. His revelations prove to be more objective than they seem. Youthful desperation is recontextualised as a historical phenomenon, a pop-cultural snapshot, its confessional mode as performative. This lets Hawkins off the hook, excuses his callow melodramatics by making them synonymous with the foibles of an era. Allusion and appropriation work both ways: when Hawkins line-draws a pornographic entanglement, he is both placing himself into the proceedings and claiming the protagonists for his world.

But as he points out, 1984 was 'the first summer of the [AIDS] epidemic and the first

deaths of close friends and lovers', and *Still Ill* doubles as a memorial to the AIDS dead. 'FUTILITY' and 'FATALITY' in portentous capitals grey-ghost the print. The models were his 'cum-triggers', but the series – or Hawkins's retrospective framing of it – converts them into archetypes of human vulnerability and transience, isolated by the ebb and flow of his handwriting's static. They are lost idols, poignantly naked, humiliated by their preposterous poses.

The new paintings – caricaturish depictions of gnarly old queens in bondage gear lording it over skinny teens – form a lugubrious middle-aged coda to the studied theatrics of *Still Ill*. A series of overpainted document folders by William Burroughs, displayed in vitrines, tie into the prevailing theme. Airbrushed streaks of scarlet offset a cutout of a gripped erection. Their inclusion emphasises the literary context of Hawkins's performance. Nods to Thomas Bernhard (in the press release) and Samuel Beckett (portrayed in a collage) feel like formal references, while the work's DNA binds it into a gay tradition of cruel desire held at bay by the florid artifice of its literary delivery: de Sade, Genet, Burroughs, Dennis Cooper. The distance between Hawkins's fifty-three- and twenty-three-year-old selves is a metaphor for that division between mind and body. As Morrissey, like a dandyish, modern-day Descartes, artfully repined (in the song *Still Ill*): "Does the body rule the mind or does the mind rule the body? I don't know." Mark Prince



*Still Ill: An Illuminating Manuscript*, page 17, 1984,  
acrylic and ink on paper, 61 x 46 cm. Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin & Cologne

My dad liked ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arrangement. Not that he ever attended any proper classes: the 1970s leanings for DIY suggested illustrated books and free experimentation instead. So I only grew accustomed to the basics of every composition: sky, earth and mankind (*ten-chi-jin*), like in a miniature landscape. Otherwise translatable as: vertical, horizontal and what exists between them, in accordance to constant ratios in lengths of the stems and variations in grace, colour and shape. Visiting Paolo Icaro's exhibition made me feel like a Lilliputian taking a walk in a diagram of an oversize, conceptual ikebana.

The layout of the 13 works (stretching from the present day back to 1967, when Icaro was based in SoHo, New York, before returning to Italy and joining the front ranks of Arte Povera) is as careful as it is surprisingly playful and light-hearted, like a game repeated for the *n*th time. Vertical elements define the whole space: *Linee equilibrio terra–cielo* (Equilibrium Lines Earth–Sky, 2014), a site-specific series of thin aluminium rods balancing themselves from floor to ceiling, is scattered across two rooms. The ground is occupied by a large floor piece – *Cumulo rete* (Aggregation Net, 1968), a fluid 'web' of steel chains

clad in tubular polyethylene, linked together with square links – and two wooden boxes, both from 1969. One, *Blue Amalfi*, contains 100 postcards from Amalfi, with sunny views of its sapphire sea and cerulean sky, so that it looks like a minuscule pond; the other, *Scatola del profumo* (Perfume Box), encloses a loaf of fresh bread, so that its smell – or, further away, our memory of it – subtly permeates the space. Another imaginary horizontal line is drawn across the gallery by *Asse, boccole* (Axis, Bushings, 1969): a couple of brass bushings inserted in two opposite walls at the same height.

The other works, installed in the intermediate space, at varying eye levels, are closely linked to the artist's body and the passage of time: *Ideal Biography* (1976) is an invisible self-portrait, made of a dozen virgin photographic papers inscribed at the bottom by Icaro with a (possibly accurate) scribbled caption, such as 'Le mani di nonno Luigi' (Grandpa Luigi's hands) or 'In viaggio a Tokio, 1981' (During a trip to Tokyo, 1981), as if in a private diary; *Esercizi della mano destra sulla mano sinistra* (Exercises of the Right Hand on the Left Hand, 1974–5) are eight sheets of 24 x 33 cm white paper, gently folded by placing one hand on top of the other one.

In a corner of the third and last room, the tour closes with *Stella Sirio* (Sirius Star, 1969), a four-metre-long stainless steel tube with a diameter of 2.5cm, diagonally implanted in the wall, offering the vision of a minuscule portion of the external sky.

The elegance of the overall configuration is so thoroughgoing that Icaro seems to make light of it by presenting, right at the entrance, his early series *Foto, nicchie* (Photos, Niches, 1974), a grid of 32 black-and-white prints recording all the different positions of a set of small objects arranged inside a recess in the artist's studio in Woodbridge, Connecticut, like the ever-shifting bottles of a painting by Morandi. Right beside it stands *Stele, luogo del ramo, orizzontale* (Stele, Site of the Branch, Horizontal, 1985), where a real branch is 'grafted' atop a tall structure in white plaster, Icaro's signature material. It, too, points outside, with all the natural beauty of its twisted asymmetry. Concerning these themes – nature, structure, divergence from these and mankind's attempts at rationality – I think Wisława Szymborska says it all and better than anyone, as usual: 'Yeti, down there we've got Wednesday, / bread and alphabets. / Two times two is four. / Roses are red there, / and violets are blue.' *Barbara Casavecchia*



*Cumulo rete*, 1968 (installation view, Peep-Hole, Milan, 2014), polyethylene pipe and galvanised steel chain, dimensions variable. Photo: Michele Alberto Sereni. Courtesy the artist

Carla Arocha and Stéphane Schraenen *Persiana*  
*Cultuurcentrum Mechelen, Belgium 25 October – 21 December*

A coalescence of two mischievous minds, *Persiana* combines work from the decade-long partnership of Carla Arocha and Stéphane Schraenen into an elegant meditation on the alchemy and treachery of perception. The shapeshifting *Mechelen Marauder* (2014), a spectacular cylinder hanging in the circular entryway, augurs what is to come: fragmenting its surroundings in innumerable mirrored pieces joined by s-shaped hooks, it alternately shimmers or fades from sight. Around the corner is a succinct expression of the exhibition's central notion: opaque white rectangles linked together in a grid and suspended off the wall, *Persiana I* (2007) reflects its title as a moniker for Venetian blinds and, highlighting the dubious duality of inside versus outside, leaves the obscured view to the imagination.

There is no inside to *Credenza*, *Cabinet* and *Bedside Table* (all 2013), whose shapes signal the functional furniture for which they were named. Made of the darkly grained wood used for modernist design classics by Charles and Ray Eames, and matching the gallery floor, they are all surface. Inset peepholes inviting visitors to peer at their contents merely look through to the other side. You are left to your own devices: each mute piece carries myriad associations depending on the state of the mind regarding it. In the centre of the space, *Carpet* (2014) appears to be a commonplace accessory of the type found at Ikea or another chic furnishing store.

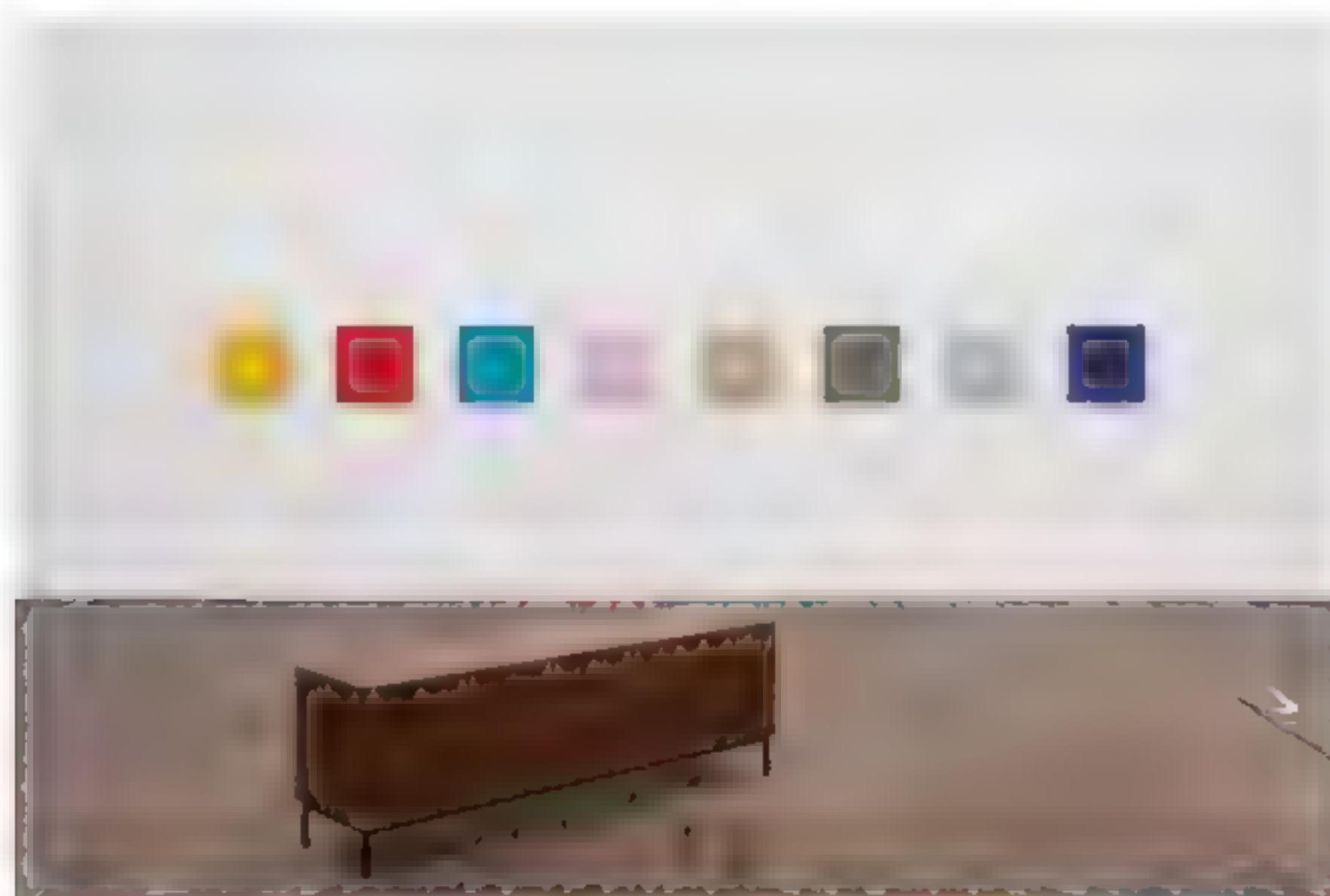
Adorned with sinuous white lines on a grey background, it is actually a copy of a depiction of a carpet photographed from a distorted angle, mimicking the mechanics of memory and further warped by a viewer's perspective. The overall effect is both uncanny and strangely familiar; together with the furniture, it evokes a dreamlike amalgam of all the homes you've lived in.

The pristine exhibition conveys a sense of balance and proportion, yet nothing is exactly what it seems. Colour is a particularly evocative medium for perceptual relativity, as its insubstantial properties are dependent entirely upon contextual conditions. *Frieze II* (2014) demonstrates the evanescent nature of hue: the uppermost surface of a white ledge painted with fluorescent orange casts a glow that mutates in form and intensity, like a sunset, in tandem with the daylight entering through the glass roof. Opposite is *Breath* (2013), where eight monochrome squares arranged in a series along the wall are perceived as paintings due to their presentation; the surfaces are actually textured leather skins whose tactile nature contradicts the fugitive ephemerality of colour.

Naturally there are many versions of windows. *Curtain* (2008), a photograph of heavy formal drapes behind glass, might recall a prim maternal skirt, concealing dangerous secrets that you both do and don't want to know. *Chris Box* (2008) resembles a psychedelic mashrabiya

screen, its open cross forms multiplying infinitely through reflective layers. The view within *In Paradise Series: Window* (2008), a photo printed on glass and placed over a mirror to three-dimensional effect, is fogged by what appears to be rain droplets on its surface. The austere and ominous *Three Lies*, a trio of crystal spheres resembling alien eyes on pedestals, reflects whirling concentric versions of the room and its inhabitants. Arrayed on the floor, *Rooms II* (2010) comprises formations in marble, architectural layouts that invoke remains of an ancient civilisation, whose irregular shapes counter the symmetrical squares of the modernist building's ceiling panes.

Dazzling reflections of spinning disco balls in a dark room, *Twins* (2007–14) – multicoloured shapes emitting from one and black-and-white from the other – stir, as strongly as a scent, the vague recollection of a night long forgotten. Sealed in a vitrine as befits a precious jewel or a deadly device, the two-finger ring *C.T. Knuckle Duster* (2014) is a talisman whose multifaceted crystals, peered into, explode the room in a zillion refractions. Here the sculptures appear innocent; we are the perpetrators, our minds both lethal weapons and magic wands, transforming inner visions into physical entities. The show itself, in this regard, suggests an immersive prism reflecting various layers of reality and the gaps in between: the deceptiveness of perpetually pulsating physical space. *Cathryn Drake*



*Persiana*, 2014 (installation view).  
Photo: Pieter Huybrechts. Courtesy the artists

## *The Unwinding*

### *Cookie Butcher, Antwerp 22 November–1 February*

In the not so distant past, the area around Antwerp's Central Station was home to a thriving Jewish community. Nowadays only a handful of shops remain, like the Hoffman fishmongers, the Steinmetz bakery and the famous kosher restaurant Hoffy's. That feeling of decay is also strongly embedded in the exhibition *The Unwinding*, curated by collector Philippe Piessens for the private not-for-profit space Cookie Butcher, situated in the middle of that neighbourhood.

Named after George Packer's eponymous 2013 nonfiction book – a portrait of various Americans, and the societal changes they dealt with, which seems to imply the decline of the American Dream – the show combines work by three younger American artists with images by the late New Topographics photographer Lewis Baltz. Industrial-looking objects are scattered throughout the exhibition space, like props in a postapocalyptic landscape. A plank covered with thick layers of plaster leans against a wall (Virginia Overton's *Untitled*, 2014); cement bags without wrapping, cast in concrete, are stacked on top of each other (Charles Harlan's *Concrete*, 2014); a long yellow cable hangs aimlessly from the ceiling (Michael E. Smith's

*Untitled*, 2014). In the background, one can hear the mechanical rattling of what sounds like a concrete mixer in Smith's video *Trouble Stand* (2008), which functions as the perfect soundtrack for the show. Should it come as a surprise that the artist was born in Detroit?

Many of the displayed works are *objets trouvés*. Overton, for example, cut a square out of parquet that now no longer lies on the floor but hangs on the wall like a painting (*Parquet (a)*, 2013). A bit easy, if you ask me; more convincing is her other contribution, a mirror-surfaced rectangle of pliable material bent backwards with a strap (*Untitled (Convex)*, 2011). It's a work that contains a kind of Matias Faldbakken-esque violent gesture while dealing with sculptural issues of tension and countertension. Smith also uses found objects, but does so more appropriately than Overton. By simply turning a weathered bowl upside down, he manages to set a feeling of menace emanating from what now looks like a shamanic, ritualistic object.

The work of these younger artists does, in any case, match very well with the atmosphere in Baltz's series of black-and-white pictures. Redoubling the tone of decay and waste, Baltz closes in on deserted areas in the city, wastelands

and industrial settings, including buildings with blocked-off doors and windows. In a way the show can also be regarded, retrospectively, as a tribute to Baltz, who died on the day of the opening and whose influence and preoccupation with abstraction and degrading can be felt to a certain extent through the work of this younger generation. Which makes you wonder: what do these guys actually add to existing traditions? They 'refer' to Postminimalism, but aren't they just recycling it – both regarding materials and ideas? OK, the US is no longer the industrial powerhouse it used to be, hence the artists work with cheap, leftover materials instead of massive metal or steel like Carl Andre or Donald Judd used to do. But still.

Yet, strangely enough, while individually the works might not always convince, together they create a strong, mutually reinforcing unity. They're brought together in such a way that *The Unwinding* almost feels more like a solo show than a group exhibition. Or, perhaps, a lesson in how one can still make a striking show using works that wouldn't necessarily stand up on their own but which, combined, create a compelling mood of dereliction.

Sam Steverlynck



Charles Harlan, *Concrete*, 2014.  
Courtesy the artist and JTT Gallery, New York

## *The Alien Within – A Living Laboratory of Western Society*

*Malmö Konsthall, 14 November – 1 March*

A dark wall made of raw wooden planks: the roughly sawn door has a peephole in it, as well as a hole for a dog; fish hang from drying racks; a cartoonish black-and-white wall drawing features a church, a warrior and an ostrich. The so-called Welcome Center in the late Christoph Schlingensief's large-scale installation *Animatograph – Icelandic Edition. Destroy Thingvellir* (2005) gives a slightly menacing hint of what awaits inside the shedlike construction that houses the piece. On entering, one is instantly subjected to a sensory overdose. Projections, photographs, notes, objects and sounds fill the gloomy, labyrinthine corridors leading to the heart of the artwork, a revolving stage. Stepping up onto it, the viewer is suddenly a part of the show, doubling as both spectator and spectacle. Sitting on an old sofa, sharing the space with scattered props – a toilet, flags, signs, texts and drawings – you slowly move around the shifting scenarios, flooded by light from projected images and vibrating with loud announcements from wall-mounted loudspeakers.

Showing Schlingensief's work in Malmö Konsthall – an airy, light-drenched icon of optimistic Nordic museum architecture from the 1970s – at this conflict-ridden moment in European history is undoubtedly a piece of good timing. Like Europe as a whole, Malmö, home to a relatively large immigrant population, is struggling with segregation, the rise of rightwing

extremism and religious fundamentalism. Nevertheless, from my Stockholm institutional perspective, the local cultural institutions, such as the Moderna Museet Malmö and Malmö Konstmuseum, seem to have a growing consciousness of how culture has become a warzone and of the need to argue for culture in society at large. New Konsthall director Diana Baldon's first exhibition here is clearly fuelled by this same ambition. In *The Alien Within – A Living Laboratory of Western Society*, the work of the main protagonist, Schlingensief, is accompanied by a programme of lectures and performances, including ones by urbanist Saskia Sassen and filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha that seek to address culture's role in times of social unrest.

The show is the first presentation of Schlingensief's work in a Scandinavian art institution. Dense, thought-provoking and on the whole convincing, it struggles with the problem of how to exhibit the renowned and controversial director, filmmaker and activist's oeuvre, which was originally made to be performed. The formula here is an archival approach, adding documentation from several performances and actions, such as the much-debated *Ausländer raus – Bitte liebt Österreich* (*Foreigners Out – Please Love Austria*) from 2000. The no-fuss documentary approach is effective; it also offers the added bonus of giving the Malmö audience an idea of Schlingensief's method, and of actually

seeing him at work, ironically incarnating the myth of the charismatic demon director, habitually with a megaphone in his hand, addressing the masses.

*Animatograph*, with its references to proto-cinematic visual technology as well as to the Wagnerian gesamtkunstwerk, was originally conceived as a portable device that would assume different shapes depending on the context. The version showed in Malmö, the only one of Schlingensief's few installations to have remained intact, was commissioned by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna, for Reykjavík Arts Festival 2005. It takes us on a vertiginous and chaotic journey through the ancient sagas of the North, the songs of the Nibelungs, as well as Germany's colonial past, and pays tribute to giants such as Joseph Beuys and Dieter Roth. As in all his works, Schlingensief brutally wrenches the elegant suit of European culture inside out, exposing its bloodstained lining, and linking it to the xenophobia, social injustice and exclusion of today. But perhaps even more vital in the context of the harsher climate for freedom of expression in our culture is Schlingensief's uncompromising method of conflict and confrontation. This is an art that demands a space where it can act, without an obligation to be either instrumental or obedient.

*Sara Arrhenius*



Christoph Schlingensief, *Animatograph – Iceland-Edition. (House of Parliament/House of Obsession) Destroy Thingvellir*, 2005  
(installation view, *The Alien Within – A Living Laboratory of Western Society*, 2014).  
Photo: Helene Toresdotter. Courtesy Malmö Konsthall

## Alexander Gutke

Belenius / Nordenhake, Stockholm 13 November – 21 December

Marking the outset of gallerists Niklas Belenius and Erik Nordenhake's collaboration with Malmö-based Swedish artist Alexander Gutke, this show presents works from 2007 to 2014: enticing cinematic and sculptural situations that emphasise his minimalist tendencies and continuing rapport with the conceptual. The works exhibited have no clear beginning or end; it's hard to tell if they are to be viewed on their own or together as a melange of impressions, like chapters of a novella. Alongside three recent videos are a number of objects, themselves often harbouring an illusory quality reminiscent of directing techniques incorporated by auteurs like Andrei Tarkovsky, who is known to highlight life's dreamlike essence. These works seem like keys one might need to gain access to a more insightful state. Gutke has long investigated his relationship to film – dissecting the physical and technical aspects of analogue film as well as questioning ways in which cinema manipulates narrative structures with the viewer's pleasure in mind. He uses cameras, celluloid and slide projectors as tools to unravel the complexities of existentialism, metaphysics and the possibility

of boundlessness; these apparatuses provide Gutke with opportunities to survey the poetic and self-reflexive. The viewer, gliding through the space, may accordingly be inclined to turn his or her interpretative lens inward.

In Gutke's work, high sentiments are relayed via selective usage of light and space. Shades of gold float on a black background as subdued flames engulf a vintage matchbook in his six-minute video *Draw (Gold)* (2014). In *Loud, Loud* (2014), the brass volume-knob of a classic, tube-driven Marshall amplifier – blown up into a sculptural enlargement (137.5 percent of an actual knob) and resembling at once a small clock and a miniature schematic sun – serves as a solitary wall piece. Yet it performs no time-telling function; its integers for measurement appear quizzical in that they feature no numbers, only lines, except for '10', which is placed near the bottom and appears twice, once reversed, like a straightforward reflection. As noted by Livia Paldi in the press release, the amp knob – in part also shorthand for another analogue technology, like film – is 'attuned to the scale and proportions of its immediate surroundings

[and is] inspired by [Gutke's] subjective experience of a spectrum of noise qualities from unwanted random to expressive musical, and from loud to barely audible'. The analogue, the cosmic and processes of mirroring here explicitly fold together.

The sheer weight of infinity, as a theme, appears strongest in works like *Untitled (for Christian Andersson)* (2007), where one is able to see inside a lone black box resembling an intimate portal; the box opens from its side, allowing access to a two-way mirror and accompanying light tubes altering depth perception. Additionally, *Measure* (2011) playfully engages with eternity, being a brass measuring tape folded into a Möbius strip. 'We don't need other worlds. We need mirrors,' noted Stanisław Lem in his novel *Solaris* (1961). If this is the case, what is to be said about an exhibition such as Gutke's, which allows room for both to exist under its neomodernist umbrella? Look to the artist's installation of modular design titled *Folded into One* (2012), cardboard boxes printed similarly inside and out with a recurring stellar pattern, for your own answer. *Jacquelyn Davis*



*Loud, Loud*, 2014, a 137.5 percent enlarged replica of a Marshall amplifier knob. Courtesy the artist

## Aluminum Song

Raster Gallery, Warsaw 22 November–24 January

Karl Marx makes a fine jack-o'-lantern. Perched on a street-facing windowsill and glowing an eerie green, *Marks Trepanowany* (*Marx Trepanated*, 1978–2013) is one of the many sculptures by Krzysztof M. Bednarski on view in the seven-artist *Aluminum Song*. Underpinned by the familiar European narrative of a now waning, but not so long ago booming postwar industry, the exhibition takes aluminium as its guide, a metal sputtering associations with the everyday (furniture and cars) and the fantastic (spaceflight).

Grouped in Raster's front gallery are Bednarski's mocking, jocular aluminium assemblages of Marx portraits. Two floor-bound sculptures consist of conjoined heads, while elsewhere Marx's bust has a phallic-shaped hammer – a testosterone-pumped half of the communist symbol – nestled into its side. Bednarski's satirical proliferations of the portrait have hollowed out its political meaning: what once flew in the face of socialist imagery today verges on kitsch. Hung nearby are Marian

Bogusz's compositions painted directly onto thin polished aluminium plates, which, too, betray a passage of time. Though still reflecting light, these once lustrous mid-1970s abstract paintings have faded, the modernity promised by the new material now dulled. A similar fate might await the new works by Przemek Matecki and Piotr Łakomy, which also employ ready-to-hand aluminium-based technology likely to warp. In Matecki's paintings (all *Untitled*, 2014), canvases are roughly wrapped with aluminium foil and covered with acrylic splodges or regular geometrical forms – lines or a circle. As in Bogusz's works, the shiny aluminium surfaces are both backgrounds and inherent to the composition, shimmering with light and reflecting the surrounding space. Leaning against a wall, Łakomy's *Untitled* (2014) is a triptych of roughly cut, high-tech industrial aluminium-based honeycomb wedges. Unlike Matecki's kitchen-standard foil, Łakomy uses new lightweight composite panels at the height of current aluminium technology.

Most poignant in *Aluminum Song* is the contrast between the photographs by Paweł Pierściński and Jan Smaga. Selected from a 1967–8 series shot by Pierściński in the Polish Świętokrzyski region, the black-and-white photographs show proto-sculptural forms – coils and tubes – fabricated in foundries by anonymous workmen. Smaga's *MSNKDT* (2010), a concertina-shaped album displayed unfolded on a table, documents the abandoned skeletal interior of a prefabricated market hall, its floor strewn with rubbish. It is the site where the new building that will house Warsaw's Museum of Modern Art is to stand, its realisation a quest so far fraught with difficulty, as the city's municipality withdrew its contract with architect Christian Kerez in 2012. While Pierściński's photographs celebrate a once thriving industry (which today primarily continues outside of Europe), Smaga's album considers a wrecked in-between space, a site awaiting its uncertain future. Pavel S. Pys



*Aluminum Song*, 2014 (installation view).  
Courtesy Raster Gallery, Warsaw

## Anarchy. Utopia. Revolution.

Ludwig Museum, Budapest 17 October–11 January

There's a fine view of the Danube from a room in the Ludwig Museum, a room covered with pink posters illustrating a hammer and sickle design where the hammer looks suspiciously like a toilet brush. A piece of paper is taped to the window, bearing the clunky legend, 'My friend dildo says to you take posters, ride on Boris Popović and take photo and send us please!' Below, a suction cap adheres a large rubber phallus firmly to the pane. *Ride with Self-Photographing* (2014) is an installation by the Sarajevo-born Marko Brecelj, who clearly has a bone to pick with Mr Popović, the current mayor of Koper in Slovenia. In this group show of malcontents and provocateurs, such Frank Zappaesque irreverence is the predominant tone.

Evoking similar derision are staged photographs by Bálint Szombathy titled *Lenin in Budapest* (1972–2010), which feature him walking around the city carrying a picture of the old tyrant on a stick. Szombathy also appears in

a performance video called *Flags I, II* (1993–5) where he dances demonically in front of a map of the now-vanished Yugoslavia. More tyrants are destroyed metaphorically in the disrespectful (à la Otto Muehl) canvases of drMáriás, who gives us *Stalin in Jackson Pollock's Studio* (2014) and *Franco in Joan Miró's Studio* (2014). Deep incongruity follows, then, as we confront 12 heart-clawing drawings by Syrian children from 2014 that feature helicopters, kids on stretchers and planes dropping bombs.

Writing in the *London Review of Books* (20 November 2014), the historians Nora Berend and Christopher Clark argue that contemporary Hungary, under its prime minister Viktor Orbán, does not register a 'temporary resurgence of the "far right" in response to economic stress, but a fundamental realignment of political culture, achieved through a combination of populism, intimidation, the distribution of spoils to loyalists and authoritarian tampering with Hungary's constitutional, electoral and legal

structure'. Good timing, then, to hold an exhibition here about the freedom of artists to muse on anarchy and revolution. But exactly how much wriggle room have the locals got right now?

The answer has to be 'not much'. Most of the works on display, while worthy, are dated and were made in immediate response to the fissures of Mitteleuropa following the fall of the Berlin Wall. There is, to my eye, nothing that challenges the distortions implicit in new monuments here that whitewash Miklós Horthy's regime in the early-to-mid-twentieth century, which led the country into alliance with the Nazis; nothing that worries about new media controls, little that demands truth and reconciliation. A hint of optimism comes from SI-LA-GI's work *Apology* (2008). This framed text piece lists armed conflicts with countries apologising to each other for their aggression – the artist is quoted as proposing this 'psychologically difficult first step'. Who in power here is listening? John Quinn



Bálint Szombathy, *Deconstruction of Yugoslavia*, 1974–2011, paper, collage. Courtesy the artist

# Şahin Kaygun

*Istanbul Modern 20 November–15 February*

Perhaps the foremost sensation that hits the viewer when he or she is confronted with a familiar medium that has been manipulated and transformed is unease. The experience of leaning blindly forward into the dark, waiting for your senses to adjust, is as much an invitation to discovery as to disorientation; what Turkish photographer Şahin Kaygun's solo exhibition at the Istanbul Modern museum demonstrates, however, is that the results can also be hypnotic and exhilarating. Covering remarkable ground from the 1970s to the 90s in what was a tragically short life, Kaygun's work spanned portrait photography, Polaroid collage, mixed-media painting and filmmaking. It is indeed apt that the host institution dubs Kaygun a 'pioneer' – surrounded by a selection of such disruptive, experimental and interdisciplinary pieces, it's hard to deny that only a true avant-garde could bring these forth in the conservative, nationalistic Turkey of the 1980s.

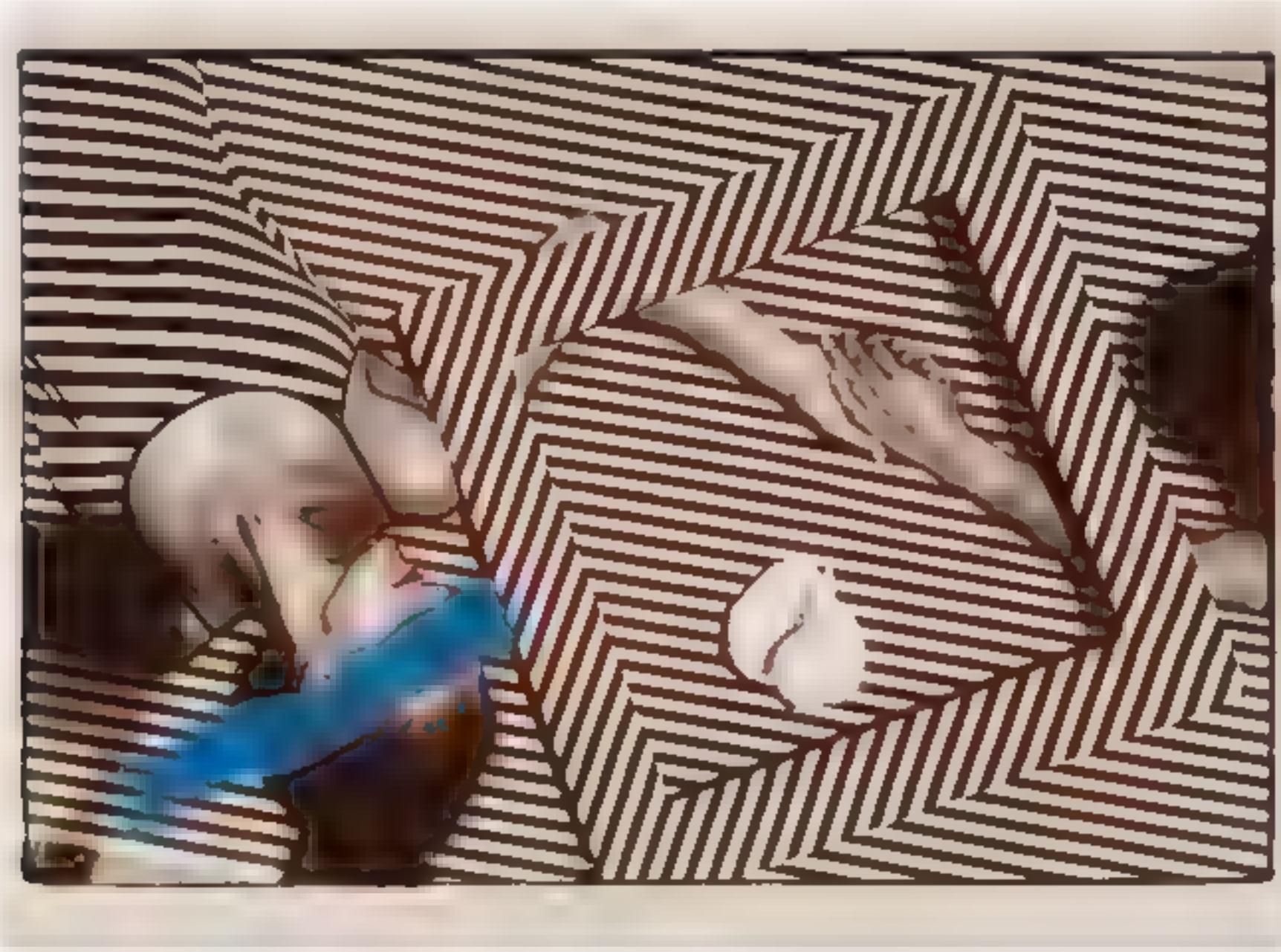
This exhibition is a result of scanning over 20,000 negatives and 20 years' worth of artworks preserved by Kaygun's family to reach a tight, selective but nonetheless balanced, 89-work array of Polaroids, photo-manipulations, films and paintings from 1978 until Kaygun's death in 1992. At the outset, the dimly lit space shines spotlights on his early black-and-white photography, where Kaygun's tendency towards

an experimental and expressionist aesthetic is already discernible in his deliberately unfocused and jarringly framed portraiture. These early works – a ghostly female lip on the frame's edge, a nude against a sparse background replicated manifold in blank collated Polaroids – show an urge to break with disciplinary norms, disrupt clarity of representation and, perhaps in doing so, reach the artist's ambition more truthfully than any one medium could facilitate: that of creating the incident rather than documenting it, as Kaygun stated in a 1984 interview.

Painting, etching and pasting directly onto his Polaroid works in the early 1980s, Kaygun's application of painterly and filmic techniques manifest in a series of eerie and fascinating mixed-media pieces where texture and shape grapple for dominance over his equally intriguing use of those traditional essentials of photography, shadow and light. Fantasy imagery and dark symbolism abound in these small but powerful squares, where the female nude, negative spaces, partially obscured views and seashell and doll motifs present a world more akin to a painter's subconscious than a portrait photographer's subjects. Yet these experiments form perhaps the most interesting part of the exhibition, especially in works where the same Polaroid has been reprinted and worked over many times in alternative mediums and

techniques. These seem to document the formation of a protean, incomplete visual language in real time; we are invited to witness the ebb and flow as Kaygun searches for a new visual vocabulary upon the same photo, subjecting it to many different layers of tactile and chromatic disruption.

His foresight in identifying the creative potential of multimedia practice is evident in that he organised the first Polaroid photography exhibition in Turkey in 1984, while also shooting a number of experimental art films – one of which, *Full Moon* (1988), was screened at Cannes Film Festival. Although the exhibition includes *Full Moon* and others, his films cannot hold their own when squeezed between the striking early Polaroids and the surreal mixed media *photo-peintures* from Kaygun's later practice. This late series, titled *In the Ancient Seas* (1991), is inspired by sculptures he photographed at the British Museum; turning these figures through his painting, collage and calligraphy on canvas into protagonists and villains in his own narrative closes the exhibition. It can by no means be called a full retrospective, given how prolific Kaygun was – but in what is to date the most comprehensive showcase of a visionary who is regrettably undervalued and unknown in Turkish art history, the Istanbul Modern has done him a well-deserved service. Sarah Jilani



*Untitled, 1985.*  
Courtesy of Burçak Kaygun and Gallery Elipsis, İstanbul

Niamh O'Malley

*Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin 12 December–25 February*

Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov's 'kino-eye' was a film montage method that could, as he saw it, show things in a way no human eye could see, and would elevate human consciousness. On the whole, film's effect on humanity has largely gone the other way to Vertov's prediction. But Niamh O'Malley has, for the past few years, produced a series of black-and-white videos that calmly survey a landscape, yet also slowly let what we're seeing merge with how we're seeing it – shadows conflate with the screen, blinking becomes linked with editing, the eye becomes the lens. We've already become, O'Malley seems to suggest, Vertov's living kino-eye, editing and shaping things with every glance; we just habitually ignore the fact.

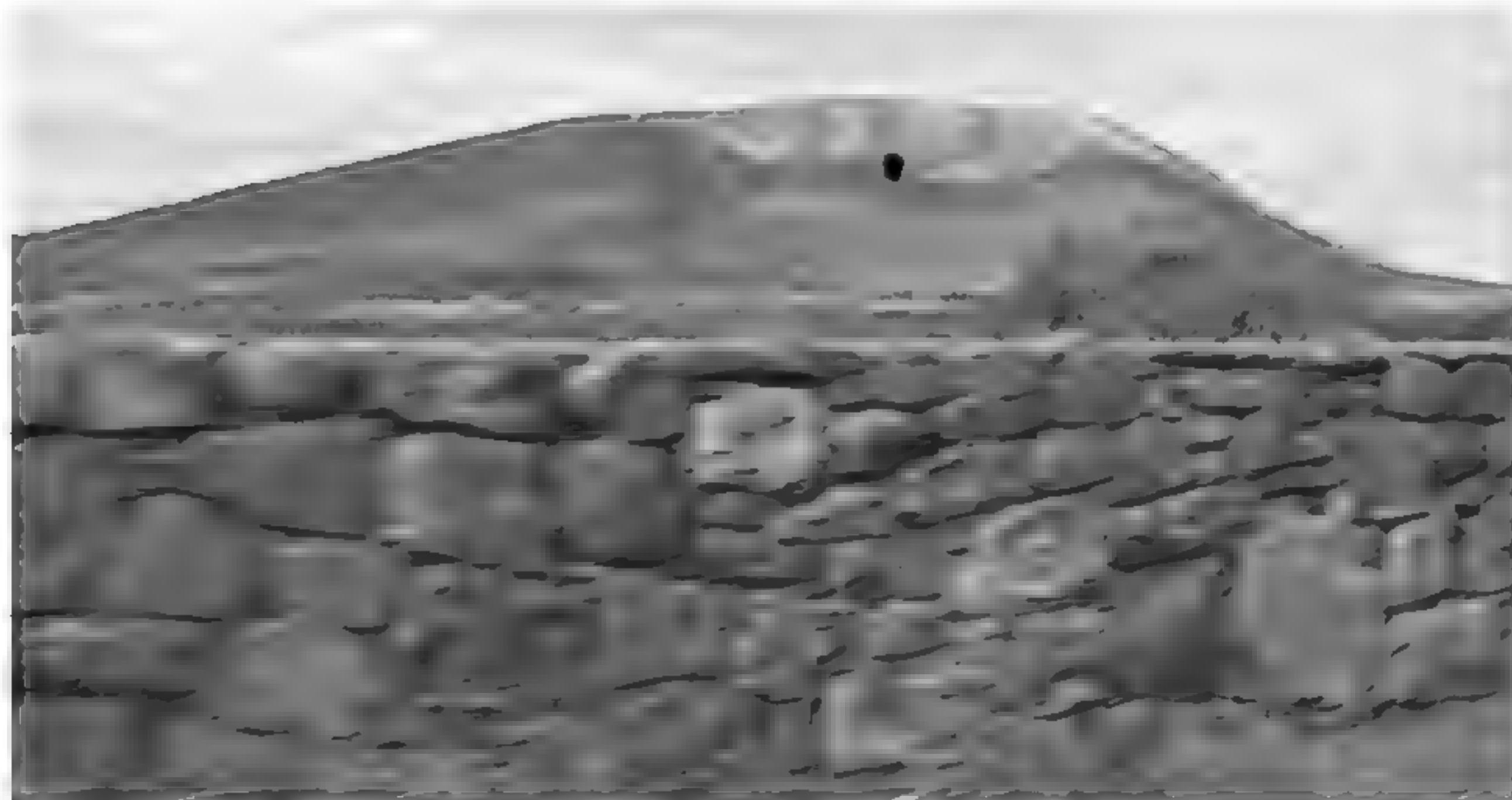
This latest exhibition is no different, with the video *Nephin* (2014) as its centrepiece, documenting a passenger-side view of a car journey circling a low, grass-covered mountain. The rounded landform stays centre-screen as we pass by houses and fields, with hedgerows occasionally blocking the view, but after a while, it's likely that the only thing we'll focus on is a small,

black dot that persists on the upper right of the screen. Whether a speck on the car window or the camera lens, it's a small but effective reminder of the limits to how we view the world. As a further reminder, two tall, framed panels of coloured glass, one pink and one yellow, flank the video screen, letting us view the scene in another hue.

It's a point that this reserved and refined installation of 17 works of drawing, glass sculptures and two films continually reemphasises: that seeing is always layered, always filtered, always framed. Several drawings depict the same mountain, rock or mound of dirt, each presented behind a speckled pane of tinted glass. But it's when O'Malley all but gives up on her chosen subject of landscape that her bio-structuralist meditations become more productive. The small *Untitled* (2014) is a dense weave of short, modest pencil marks, accumulating and almost merging with the lines and shadows projected by the pocked layer of glass that covers it. The real heart of the show feels tucked into a few hidden corners of the angular concrete gallery: *Shelf* (2014)

is a small stretch of beech with three pieces of glass propped on top. Here, a roughly L-shaped shard of yellow glass is mirrored by a grey fragment that resembles it, though its dark brother is lined unevenly with copper. Both of them form a miniature stage for a rectangle of clear glass, smudged with a blotch of white paint; here, O'Malley distils her entire show in one small breath.

The two-screen video *Glasshouse* (2014) is ostensibly a slow pan across the broken and dirtied panes of a greenhouse, at first seeming like a widescreen panorama, our minds naturally connecting the two screens as the scene passes from right to left. It's only after a concentrated few minutes that you can distinguish the stereoscopic effect and realise that the two screens aren't linked, in some cases even showing the same stretch of the greenhouse. It's in the small gap between the two monitors that the work takes hold, the darkness that allows our mind to invest in, and effectively create, a new unified image; and it's in this gutter that O'Malley excels. *Chris Fite-Wassilak*



*Nephin* (production still), 2014,  
HD video, 16:9, silent. Courtesy the artist

## Abraham Cruzvillegas *The Autoconstrucción Suites*

Museo Jumex, Mexico City 14 November–8 February

Museo Amparo, Puebla 15 November–9 February

Abraham Cruzvillegas's *The Autoconstrucción Suites* is spontaneous, unstable, contradictory – no coincidence then that in the near-decade that Cruzvillegas has been working on this series of works or accumulations, some are also titled *Autodestrucción, or Demolición*. The exhibition, curated by Clara Kim, has travelled from the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis – where it was shown in 2013, also curated by Kim – and is the most complete display of works by Cruzvillegas thus far, not to mention his largest show in Mexico. The Museo Jumex in Mexico City houses half of it, including the aforementioned *Demolición* (2014), a site-specific performance for this iteration of the show, in which two Huasteco musicians dance a traditional *zapateado* to their adaptation of the eponymous tune by the Peruvian proto-punk band Los Saicos. In the city of Puebla, meanwhile, the Museo Amparo is home to the other half, with the addition – the show itself is in perpetual construction! – of a new large installation piece in the courtyard, titled *Reconstrucción del retrato de mi gemelo cholulteca, perdido por siglos en los lodazales de Cladh Hallan, con un simuláneo parecido a Germán List Arzubide y a Vicente Lombardo Toledano, pero con dos botellas de coñac* (or something like *Reconstruction of the*

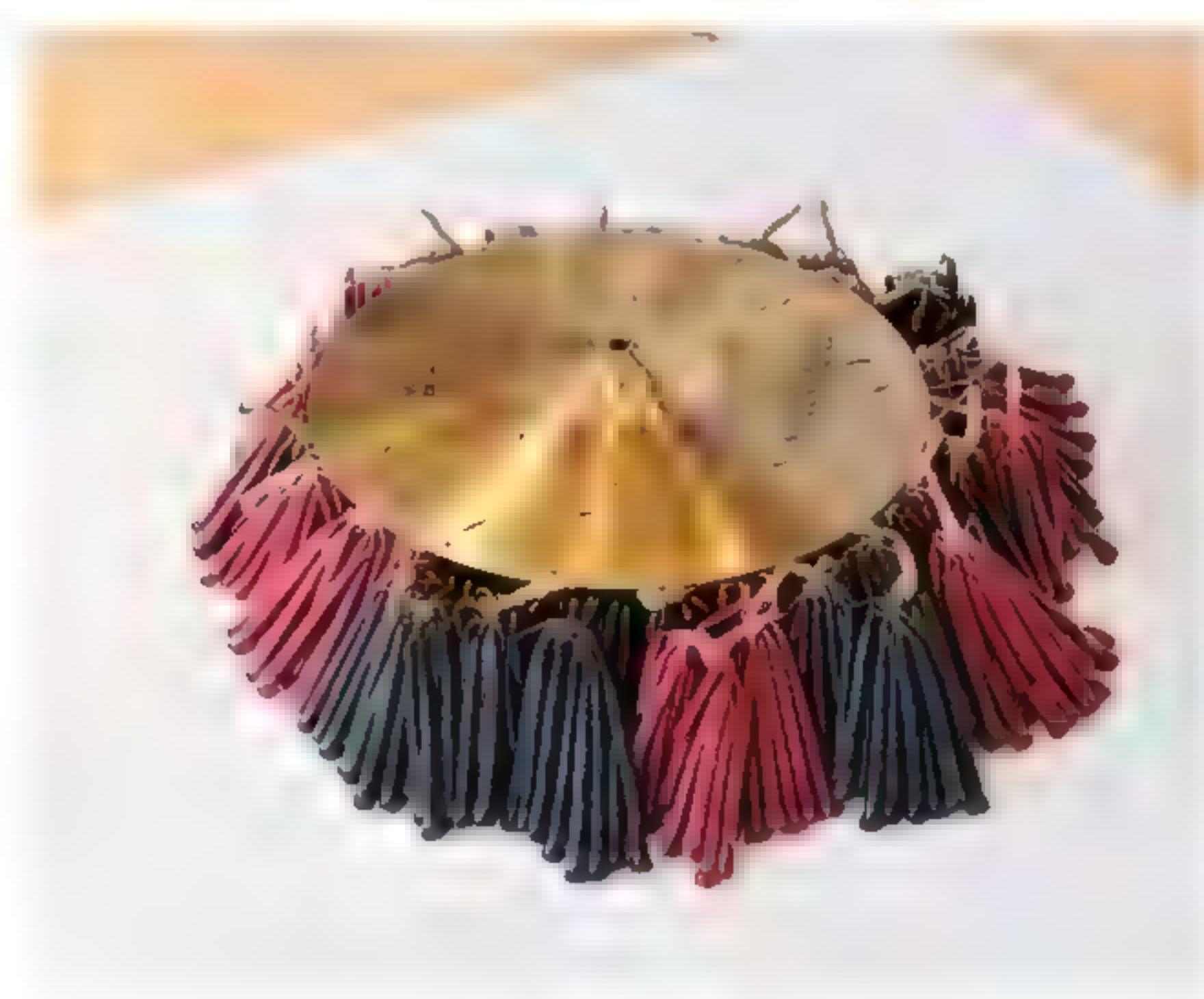
*Portrait of My Cholultec Twin, Lost for Centuries in the Cladh Hallan Bog, with a Simultaneous Likeness to Germán List Arzubide and Vicente Lombardo Toledano But with Two Bottles of Cognac, 2014*), which Cruzvillegas created in collaboration with local students.

Cruzvillegas's process and work have been read as ongoing autobiography (the concept of *autoconstrucción* itself stemming from his childhood home and neighbourhood, where peasant migrant families built their own houses from whatever materials they could find), and they also function archaeologically as a series of objects meant to reveal something about a culture, not just about the artist himself. Like Mexico (or Korea, or Scotland, where many of the works were made), they have a feel that is both archaic and modern, dirty and neat – the artworks discreetly reveal the story of a place and time, if one pays attention. And the objects that make up those works themselves are about as heterodox as Cruzvillegas's sense of fashion – one day a traditional Mexican shirt with Japanese construction worker pants, the next a reggaeton-style favela sports jersey with a herringbone jacket. The idiosyncratic choice of ingredients he adds to the mix – mostly found

things, dare I call them readymades, or ready-unmades? – make up a body of work that is very singularly *Cruzvillegean*; a new language.

I have worked translating texts about Cruzvillegas's work, some by the artist himself, and written texts like this one, inspired by his work as well, so I am familiar with many. But several had never before been seen in Mexico, and their physical presence, their delicateness and the equilibrium between their fragility and their simplicity in conjunction with a feeling of rawness are truly moving (cf. *La Curva*, 2003, to mention just one). And just as it is hard to describe the feeling of someone's home by, say, looking at photographs in an architectural magazine, it is very difficult to convey the sense of space, homeliness and warmth of Cruzvillegas's pieces unless you've experienced being *in* them or *with* them. Because you are *in* them, part of them – these works are not just sculptures to be observed from a distance. They are texts, contexts, textures, music pieces, plays, movies, sculptures, blocks of colour – a system, a code, a way of life to be experienced, a palpable feeling of communion where the Mexican saying applies: *mi casa es su casa*, and so my mess is yours too.

Gabriela Jauregui



Abraham Cruzvillegas, *La curva (The Curve)*, 2003,  
tallow candlesticks, cotton, nails, bronze cymbal, glass beads.  
Speyer Family Collection, New York

## León Ferrari *La Donación León Ferrari*

Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires (MAM) 8 November–22 February

Commemorating the donation to the museum in 2014 of 72 drawings by León Ferrari, this exhibition comprises a large complement of the works given by Ferrari's family, shown along with a selection of prints, sculptures and drawings on loan or from the museum's existing collection.

Ferrari, who died in 2013 at the age of ninety-two, is perhaps best known for the religious/sacrilegious subject matter that pitted him against Pope Francis, then archbishop of Buenos Aires, over blasphemous works shown in a 2004 retrospective. Some of the same works drew protesters out to picket the São Paulo Bienal in 2014, incensed by a Virgin Mary and Child sculpture swarming with cockroaches, and another being fed into a meat grinder. Here at the MAM, a 2000 statuette of Jesus with a crown of pins is shown alongside works from Ferrari's *Relecturas de la Biblia* (Rereadings of the Bible) series, in which canonical images from Western religious art mesh with images and words from other places and times. In an untitled 1987 collage, for example, a Renaissance angel materialises in a mid-twentieth-century photograph to spear a pile of emaciated corpses; and in another, painted mediaeval Crusaders canter grimly, swords drawn, towards a Japanese woodblock print in the *shunga* style of a couple engaged in enthusiastic, explicit sex.

What shocks most in this exhibition, though, is a series of chilling newspaper clippings Ferrari collected before going into exile in São Paulo in 1976, escaping the violence of Argentina's vicious

military dictatorship. Ferrari used the clippings in 1997 to make the series *Nosotros No Sabíamos* (We Didn't Know), in which he printed biblical quotations in Braille (transcribed into Spanish on exhibition labels) over photocopies of selected cuttings. 'Now go and smite Amalek,' says the Braille text on *Now Go*, over one clip reporting the discovery of eight corpses in a parking lot. 'Utterly destroy all that they have,' it goes on, 'and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling' (1 Samuel 15:3). Simmering with grief and rage when it was created, the work is all the more heart-wrenching twenty years on, given the knowledge that Ferrari's son Ariel was 'disappeared' in 1977, having stayed in Buenos Aires when the rest of the family left. His girlfriend, Liliana Mabel Bietti, returned from Brazil to search for him in the same year and was herself abducted, tortured and never seen again. In Argentina, even language turns against itself: people not only disappear, but 'are disappeared'; and it's possible to speculate on whether someone committed suicide or 'was suicided' (the term much in vogue there in January this year, when prosecutor Alberto Nisman was found with a bullet through his head on the eve of an appearance before Argentina's Congress, in which he was to have formally accused President Kirchner of a cover-up over the 1994 bombing of a Jewish centre.)

Words form an immense part of Ferrari's oeuvre, appearing occasionally as text, but more often as ciphers of themselves, or as the suggestion

of words impossible to utter. Some of the legible examples in this exhibition are in the 1964 ink-on-paper series *Manuscripts*: 'Art my son is a beautiful woman who hates to be alone,' begins one, in curlicued writing reminiscent of that of Ferrari's *Cuadro Escrito* (Written Painting) of the same year, not included in this exhibition, which describes the painting the artist would make 'if I could paint'.

Much of Ferrari's subsequent work turns on the creation of forms and strokes that come together to look like text but are not text – the tense, neurotic script of a 1976 untitled pastel, for example, impossible to decipher, but readable nonetheless as a score of paranoia and anxiety. Ferrari revisited his scripts again and again over the years, drawing immense canvases of finely wrought, carefully inked curves, Arabic-looking inscriptions and masses of hypnotic scribble, perfectly rhythmical, as in the *Errors* series of 1991. In pen, ink, water-colour and pencil, exquisite gestures cram pages on which the more you look, the more words seem to be straining to make it through the static before being drawn back in, submerged in a babble of lines. 'I draw words,' Ferrari wrote in 1997. 'Manuscripts, whose strokes are reminiscent of voices... I write drawings about thoughts and images that words cannot express.' As these drawings demonstrate over and over again, Ferrari achieved an extraordinary eloquence in that endeavour, fusing textlike image and imagelike text in a wordless, soulful articulation, laden with meaning. Claire Rigby



León Ferrari, *Untitled*, from the series *Relecturas de la Biblia*, 1988,  
collage on paper, 25 x 35 cm. Colección Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires.  
© Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari

## *Lee Mingwei and His Relations*

### *Mori Art Museum, Tokyo 20 September–4 January*

A key to Taiwanese-American artist Lee Mingwei's works is audience participation; or at the very least an open-mindedness. Often these works require spectators to go beyond a passive visual reception and take the work deeper into their hearts and minds. This in itself is a rather radical concept for visitors to large exhibitions in Japan; most showgoers' experience of art is through crowded, blockbuster exhibitions of priceless classics and modern masters, presented with inviolable instructions concerning where to stand and where to look next. So how would local audiences take the kind of art experience that Lee has to offer?

Perhaps curator Mami Kataoka was concerned about this when she decided to conciliate this large survey of Lee's practice with a side exhibition of work by 11 artists, religious leaders and philosophers. Moving from Lee's *Through Masters' Eyes* (2004, a reflection on the practice of copying and its place in Eastern and Western art traditions that features a series of six artists from the US and six from Taiwan, each of whom was invited to copy the work of the artist before them in a kind of chain letter that starts with a classical seventeenth-century Chinese mountainscape by Shi Tao), to twentieth-century calligraphy by Zen philosophers D.T. Suzuki and Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, viewers are presented with works that they can consume in the traditional

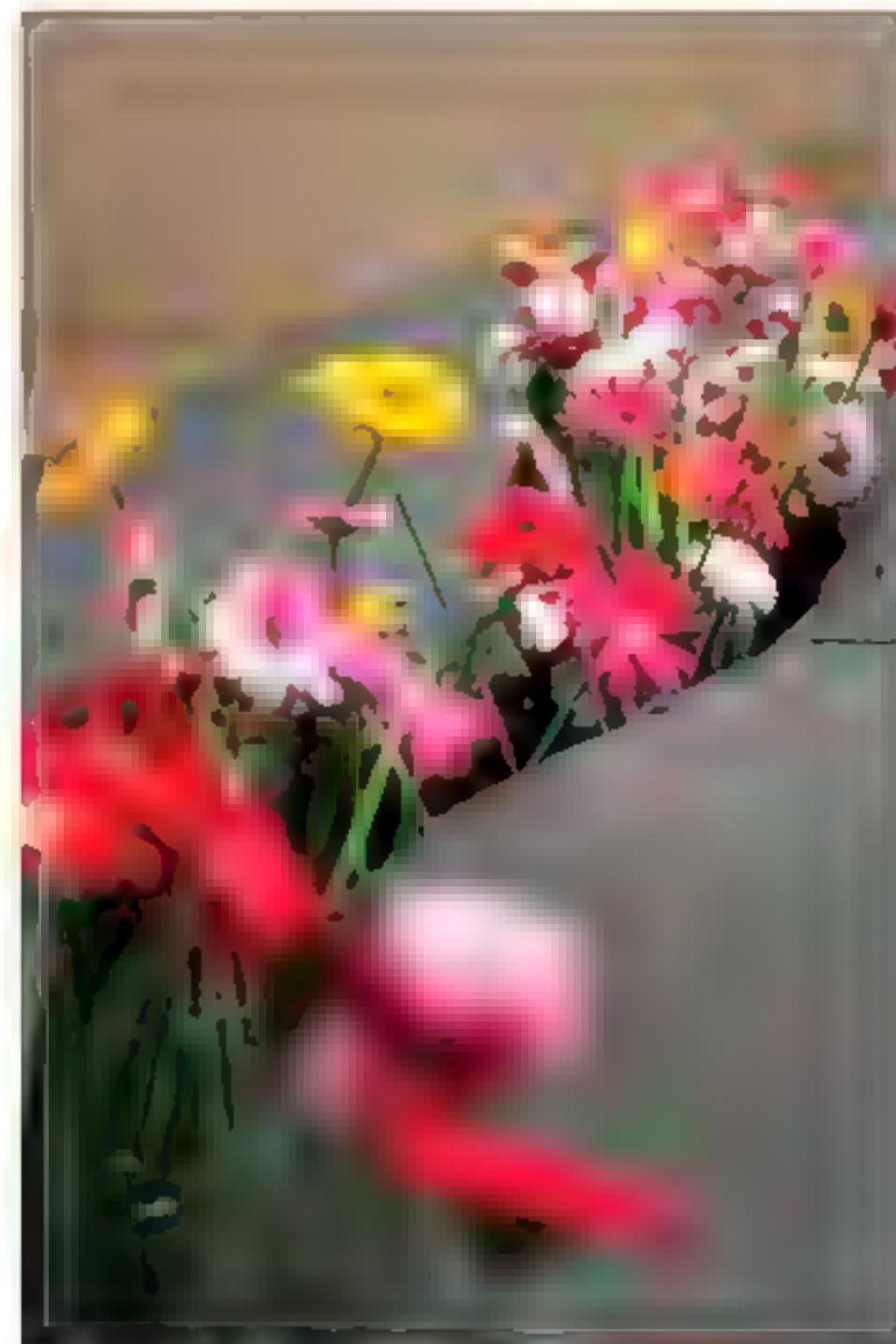
passive viewer–artwork manner. This is followed by a room of mid- to late-twentieth-century performance art, including John Cage's *4'33"* (1952), and *7 Kinds of Sympathy* (1976) by Allan Kaprow. The narrative finishes with relational aesthetics, as it is known today, presented via the work of Mingwei's contemporaries, among them Rirkrit Tiravanija, who shares a Thai curry lunch with invited participants, and Tsuyoshi Ozawa, who makes art from dinner ingredients and then, similarly, shares a meal with his audience. Participation and performance are not new concepts for local art audiences; leaving aside the contemporary work of Ozawa and US-based Koki Tanaka, the Japanese context for participatory art – in the form of happenings, for example – has a lineage stretching back to the experimentation of postwar groups such as Gutai (during the 1950s) and Hi Red Center (during the 1960s).

As opposed to the outgoing optimism of Lee's home base, New York, Tokyo is a city full of introverts. While giving a flower to a stranger, as is required for those participating in *The Moving Garden* (2009, a 12m-long granite table with 100 flowers that appear to grow out of a crack down its middle, visitors are invited to take a loose flower from the table on the condition that they give it away before reaching their next destination), could be a moment of delight for the majority of passersby on the streets of New York,

the same act may cause a feeling of shyness, even discomfort, for those negotiating public spaces in Japan's megalopolis. With *The Mending Project* (2009), in which the audience is invited to bring in clothes that need repair for the artist or his assistants to mend, Tokyo visitors seem reluctant to display their flawed garments. The result is that many of the 'mended' pieces left on the table are in fact augmented with embroidery rather than repaired. As a result, Lee's works are renegotiated; Tokyo audiences do indeed change his art.

On the other hand, *Fabric of Memory* (2006), Lee's collection of treasured heirlooms donated by volunteers, attracts the adoration of many gallery visitors. But it offers a more passive experience, in which audiences are invited to sit, view precious objects such as a well-loved teddy bear or an old kimono and read a text explaining the history of the piece written by its owner. *The Letter Writing Project* (1998/2004) also operates successfully. In it, visitors are invited to write 'the letter they always meant to write' and then choose either to seal it or to leave it open for others to read. Many local participants opt to share theirs with fellow visitors. If Lee's projects are constantly renegotiated as they encounter new audiences, then perhaps we can also hope that they have an equal and opposite impact on the way those audiences relate to the world.

*Emily Wakeling*



*The Moving Garden*, 2009/2014 (installation view, *Lee Mingwei and His Relations: The Art of Participation – Seeing, Conversing, Gift-Giving, Writing, Dining and Getting Connected to the World*, 2014, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo). Photo: Yoshitsugu Fuminari. Courtesy Mori Art Museum, Tokyo

## Follow the Heart: The Art of Sean Scully, 1964–2014, London, New York

Shanghai Himalayas Museum 23 November–25 January

Given that more than 100 of Scully's artworks are gathered together in property developer Dai Zhiqiang's privately funded museum, there is no other way of describing this exhibition than as 'major'. If that seems like a quick descent into PR-speak, then it should give you a taste of how this show (curated by Philip Dodd) is framed. It is littered with wall texts that attempt to 'connect' the artist's work to a Chinese audience. We learn that Scully read Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* (1975) during the 1980s, has a black belt in karate and that his black-and-white works resonate (somehow) with Chinese ink painting. We even get a celebrity endorsement in the form of Bono's (in his guise as a collector) thoughts on Scully's work. No mention, of course, of Ai Weiwei, whom Scully taught at Parsons School of Design in New York during the 1980s. All of which proposes the question of to what extent you can ignore the most obvious context of this show (which is housed in a gallery surrounded by a five-star hotel, a shopping mall and, on my November visit, a soon-to-be-opened German-style Christmas market): that of a celebrated artist trying to conquer an Asian market.

Curiously then, given Scully's reputation as one of Europe and America's foremost abstract painters, the centrepiece of the exhibition is not a painting, but a sculpture, *China Piled Up* (2014). It is inspired, apparently, by China's status as the steel capital of the world. You'll not be surprised to learn that it comprises a series of boxlike steel frames that offer a geometry not unlike that of the wooden shipping crates in which Scully's paintings travel. They present the viewer with a maze of different, alternate perspectives and passageways through the whole. It seems an open structure, despite its obvious cagelike form. A double-sided or ironic take on China? It's certainly the kind of wit of which the rest of what's on show suggests Scully – who can come across as an austere and strict abstractionist – is capable.

The exhibition itself is arranged broadly chronologically (allowing it to be further animated by the artist's biography), moving from early Fauvism-inspired figurative works, through to experiments with geometric units of colour during the 1970s, more bricklike units culminating in the *Wall of Light* paintings started

during the late 1990s, and more recent series, among them the artist's *Doric* works. The paintings in the latter series (such as *Doric Proteus*, 2013), which came into being around the time Greece was sliding towards financial ruin, comprise ordered grids of weirdly colourful greys, whites and blacks that evoke the same sort of tension between freedom and constraint as the exhibition's central sculpture.

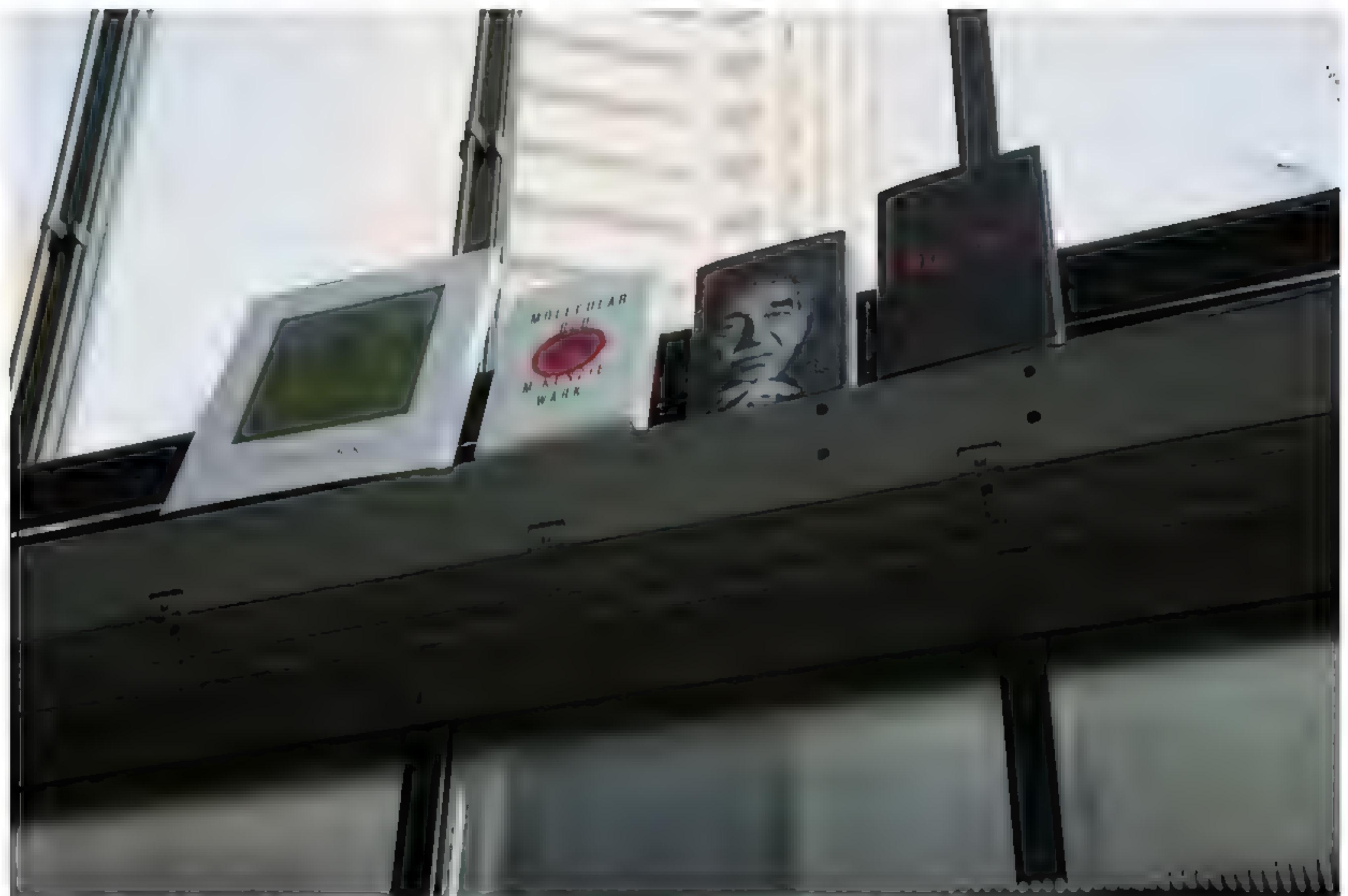
In the end, however, it's one of the smaller rooms, featuring a packed display of photographs – of shacks, peeling walls, doors and doorways – and works on paper that is the most fascinating. Clearly grounding Scully's compositions, with their focus on geometry, light and texture, in lands (Morocco, Mexico, the Dominican Republic) and human landscapes. Even if certain aspects of the presentation (not Scully's work itself) seem like an overcooked marketing exercise (of course every exhibition is to some degree an exercise in marketing or positioning), the work on show here is strong enough to rise above that and tell its own, surprisingly human, story.

Mark Rappolt



*China Piled Up*, 2014, Corten steel.  
© the artist

# Books



## *I'm Not Here to Give a Speech*

by Gabriel García Márquez Penguin, £9.99 (hardcover)

This neat collection of Gabriel García Márquez's speeches sets out the revered Colombian novelist's two key passions. Neither will surprise readers (all 30 million of them) of his 1967 work *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, or the many other novels, short stories and essays García Márquez completed before his death last year. First there is a quest to identify a Latin American spirit, and to celebrate and defend it. Second is an enduring belief in the power of the imagination. Both are perhaps best summed up in a speech given at the opening of the exhibition *Figuration and Fabulation: 75 Years of Painting in Latin America 1914–1989* at the Museum of Fine Art, Caracas, via an anecdote the writer tells about watching the first moon landing. Two European couples, two Latin American couples and all their assorted children are gathered

round the television. 'We were all levitating at the awesomeness of history. All except the Latin American children, who asked in chorus: "But is it the first time?" ... For them, everything that had ever passed through their imaginations – like El Dorado – had the value of accomplished fact.'

For García Márquez the imagination is not something akin to idle daydreaming, or the preserve of entertainment, but the defining force for social and political good. Knowing that his fame had bought him the ear of the powerful, he used it to make fierce, uncompromising (and probably quite uncomfortable, were one present in the audience) denouncements of society's wrongs. In a 1986 speech made to the presidents and prime ministers of Argentina, Mexico, Tanzania,

Greece, India and Sweden, he presented an awful description of life after nuclear apocalypse; at a meeting in 1995 that included former presidents and vice-presidents of Uruguay, Mexico and Nicaragua, among similarly lofty audience members, he condemned the US-led 'war on drugs', noting, 'My impression is that the traffic in drugs is a problem that has slipped out of humanity's hands.' Going on to refer to the US military's aerial eradication of drug farms in Colombia, García Márquez declared that 'fumigation ought to begin with the island of Manhattan and city hall of Washington'.

*I'm Not Here...* certainly brings together a ragtag bunch of material, but it proves the Colombian to be as poetic and polemical in speaking as he was in writing.

Oliver Basciano

## *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene*

by McKenzie Wark Verso, £16.99 (hardcover)

The age of the Anthropocene announces that the human and natural worlds are interlinked as never before. Now that we have a hand on the scales, we can no longer rely on nature or ecology to balance what we take from nature with what we give back. In McKenzie Wark's words, 'The Anthropocene is a series of metabolic rifts, where one molecule after another is extracted by labor and technique to make things for humans, but the waste products don't return so that the cycle can renew itself.' What follows is a call to arms in which art and leisure, science and philosophy hack into each other in order to produce a way of thinking that works on both a pragmatic (proletarian) and a philosophical (bourgeois) level. It's also his own version of *Back to the Future* (1985), in which Wark comes across as a bit of a Marty McFly, dashing back to the past to proclaim new heroes and new solutions to problems in the present – principally climate change.

The book splits into two sections: the first a somewhat turgid analysis and rehabilitation of the works of Alexander Bogdanov (Lenin's rival for the leadership of the Bolshevik party and founder of Proletkult, a portmanteau of the Russian words for proletarian and culture) and Andrei Platonov (an author, whose works were banned during his lifetime because of his opposition to various Stalinist policies,

and the leading light of Proletkult); the second a more approachable (perhaps because of a lesser historical distance) trot through the works of author Donna Haraway ('A Cyborg Manifesto', 1985) and science-fiction writer Kim Stanley Robinson, whose *Mars* trilogy (1993–6) charts the colonisation and exploitation (in both industrial and ideological senses) of the red planet. In other words a twin survey of the collapsing cultural structures of Soviet Russia and post-capitalist California. Both sections are peppered with evidence of Wark's previous studies into the Situationists (frequent evocations of Guy Debord and techniques of détournement) and hacker culture (besides Wark's use of 'hack' as a description of prehacker strategies, he describes how Robinson's trilogy anticipates the search-engine age, because it contains so many terms readers can usefully look up).

The heroic status accorded these figures perhaps slightly undermines Wark's drive towards a nonhierarchical approach to thinking about our future. 'It is hard to orient oneself, let alone a movement [the Carbon Liberation Front], as an intellectual orphan,' Wark confesses in his conclusion. 'New experiences often have to be thought within the basic metaphors that already exist,' his next excuse. Thus the present haunts the past and the past haunts the present,

with, on the optimistic side, a notional future that's always up for grabs as long as we can find ways of thinking and dealing with it that's as fluid as time itself.

Does this have anything to do with art? Of course it does. Not just because many of the techniques Wark advocates are strongly connected to techniques pioneered by artists and writers (in their time often operating on the fringes of unpopular culture) during the twentieth century; but also as a result of art's facility in the imagining and exploring of new situations and possibilities. As long, of course, as art remains more than a commodity, and has values other than economic ones. At one point Wark evokes Dutch artist Constant's *New Babylon* project (1959–74), a utopian city of endless drift and play, as a model for the kind of culture that he wants us to drive towards. But such models have always resisted any attempts (other than in the form of children's playgrounds) at realisation; everything they assert, they deny by the very fact of their being artworks (categorically separated from reality, in a sphere in which alternative thinking is permitted and often celebrated as long as it has no consequences). Perhaps, in the end, when it comes to art it's this very fear that Wark is urging us to confront. *Mark Rappolt*

## Albert York

by Bruce Hainley, Calvin Tomkins and Fairfield Porter Matthew Marks Gallery, \$50 (hardcover)

For decades, Albert York's bounteous paintings have hidden in plain sight. Aficionados of deceptively substantial landscape and still-life painting, such as the critic Bruce Hainley, have long revered him; I first heard about York a few years ago from some savvy painter friends, and was speedily entranced. Calvin Tomkins, in a 1995 *New Yorker* essay, called him 'the most highly admired unknown artist in America', a précis still applicable when York died in 2009. Last year, though, his art landed under a gilded spotlight, as the gallerist Matthew Marks, who began collecting York's paintings during the early 1980s, organised, with *ArtReview*'s own contributing editor Joshua Mack and via, apparently, some painstaking loan-brokering, the first major show of his work outside of York's long-standing gallery, Davis & Langdale. That's how come we have this book, which displaces William Corbett's lovely, personal but slim *Albert York* (2010) as the essential volume on the artist.

Reproducing some 60 paintings and drawings along with vintage press clippings, and augmenting the republished Tomkins essay and another archival piece by Fairfield Porter with a typically off-beam and questing piece by Hainley, it's a gorgeous, serious-minded thing. York wouldn't have looked at it, and wouldn't have visited the show if he were alive. The one time he went to a museum to see his work, in 1989, it effectively precipitated his giving up painting; in so doing, he was retreating into

a shell within a shell. Already by the early 1960s, when York began making his tough, lyrical still lifes (influenced by Albert Pinkham Ryder and, Hainley guesses, more by Porter and other American Pop-resistant, abstraction-aware figurative painters than York let on), he had quit Manhattan as fast as he was able, settling his family upstate, delivering his paintings wrapped in brown paper. When, during the 1970s, he came into some money and depended less on selling his art, his gallery found it harder and harder to get work out of him at all. One pictures him painting, but also just standing in a field, staring intently at a tree or a cow.

That's because what his paintings feel like is the rare, quicksilver instant when reality's curtains flick apart and looking becomes transcendent. Take *Twin Trees* (c. 1963). It's approximately describable: a fuzzy, bronzy view of trees flanking a pond in which one of them is reflected. God knows what time of day or night it is – the scene looks dipped in precious metals. The painting, paring back detail yet containing all it needs to get across, is almost all atmosphere, and sanctions critical flights: Porter, in the 1975 catalogue essay reprinted here, sees the trees as 'Baucis and Philemon after Zeus, at their death, changed them into trees to grant them their desire never to be separated'.

York mostly painted landscapes, animals and still lifes of flowers, on rough sheets of timber. Within this narrow, traditionalist focus

– expanded, later, into occasional peculiar scenes of Native Americans and floating figures – he made vision, in the vernacular and exalted senses, the subject of his work. Closing in on the broken-stemmed pink flowers of *Two Zinnias* (c. 1965), or the *Two Pink Anemones in a Glass Vase in a Landscape* (1982), he invests them with an architectural massiveness that both reveals his understanding of Morandi and makes the viewer feel like an excitable Lilliputian. When, as in *Cow* (c. 1972), he paints the animal looking away as it stands in murky submarine light, what that cow is looking at or thinking about feels large, deep and incommunicable. You can spend a long time networking York's work together, wondering what kind of agents the occasional figures are – though his animals are characters too – but it guards its secrets, while spilling suggestion. It's the work of someone stunned, yet given voice, by the visible and the invisible that shadows it.

Possibly because of the gulf between what he saw and what it's possible to convey in paint, however, York's work constantly dissatisfied him. Asked by Tomkins if he'd 'ever found any real satisfaction in his work', York replied: 'Not really. Only one panel, maybe.' His work, he said, 'had no relation to good painting'. He may have been right, by his own Olympian standards. But he was fully wrong by realistic ones, and *Albert York* offers 184 pages of proof.

Martin Herbert

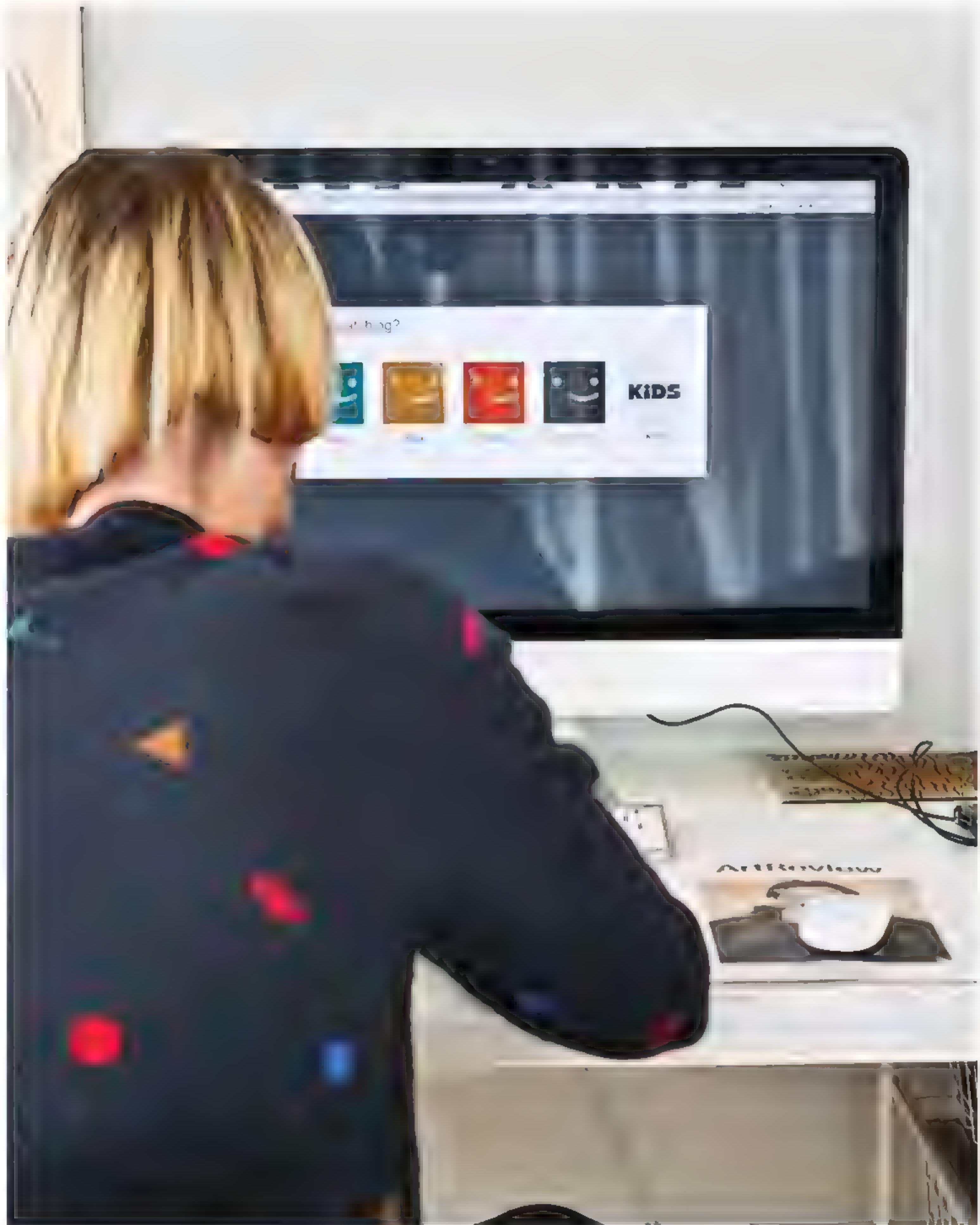
## 10:04

by Ben Lerner Granta, £14.99 (hardcover)

An octopus, whether as sociable life-form, delicacy or mode of perception, is a recurring image in Ben Lerner's second novel, a story within a story that tells the tale of its own creation in the overlapping realms of autobiography and fiction, where 'everything is as it is now, just a little different'. The creature first appears as it is being eaten, head and all, by the unnamed narrator at a boozy lunch with his agent; they are celebrating the sale of a previously published short story that will soon become the book we are now reading (that story, 'The Golden Vanity', appeared in *The New Yorker* in 2012 under the name Ben Lerner; it shows up here as Chapter 2). A short time later 'the author' – let's call him Ben – experiences his first instance of impaired proprioception: he loses track of his limbs in relation to his

body, and of his movement in space. Put another way, he perceives his surroundings as an octopus might – a useful state, as it happens, for an American writer feeling his way around the twin pillars of David Foster Wallace and Jonathan Franzen in the 2010s. This inability to 'read the realistic fiction the world appears to be' frees him to experience it metaphysically, unbound by the restrictions of space, time and dominant narrative thread. What follows is a philosophically dense literary argument lurking behind semiautonomous and often engrossing tales that may or may not reflect the author's activities over the course of the year or so in which the advance on this novel is cashed out: a fitful love affair with an artist, negotiating the desires of his closest friend's wish to be impregnated by Ben's sperm, a writer's residency in Marfa,

two epochal, tentacular storm systems. Christian Marclay's *The Clock* (2011) and Robert Zemeckis's *Back to the Future* (1985) are touchstone works here, celebrated for their power to collapse time and invoke multiple storylines – indeed 10:04 is when lightning strikes the courthouse clock tower in the latter work, permitting Marty McFly to return to the present (now the distant past of 1985), this same clip appearing at the 10:04 mark in Marclay's 24-hour work. Lerner can irritate at times with cleverness and overexplanation, a little surprising given that he comes to novels from poetry, but this story – these stories – quietly build in force as the author works his way 'from irony to sincerity', from life to art, such that the novel continues to grow in stature weeks after I returned it to my bookshelf. David Terrien



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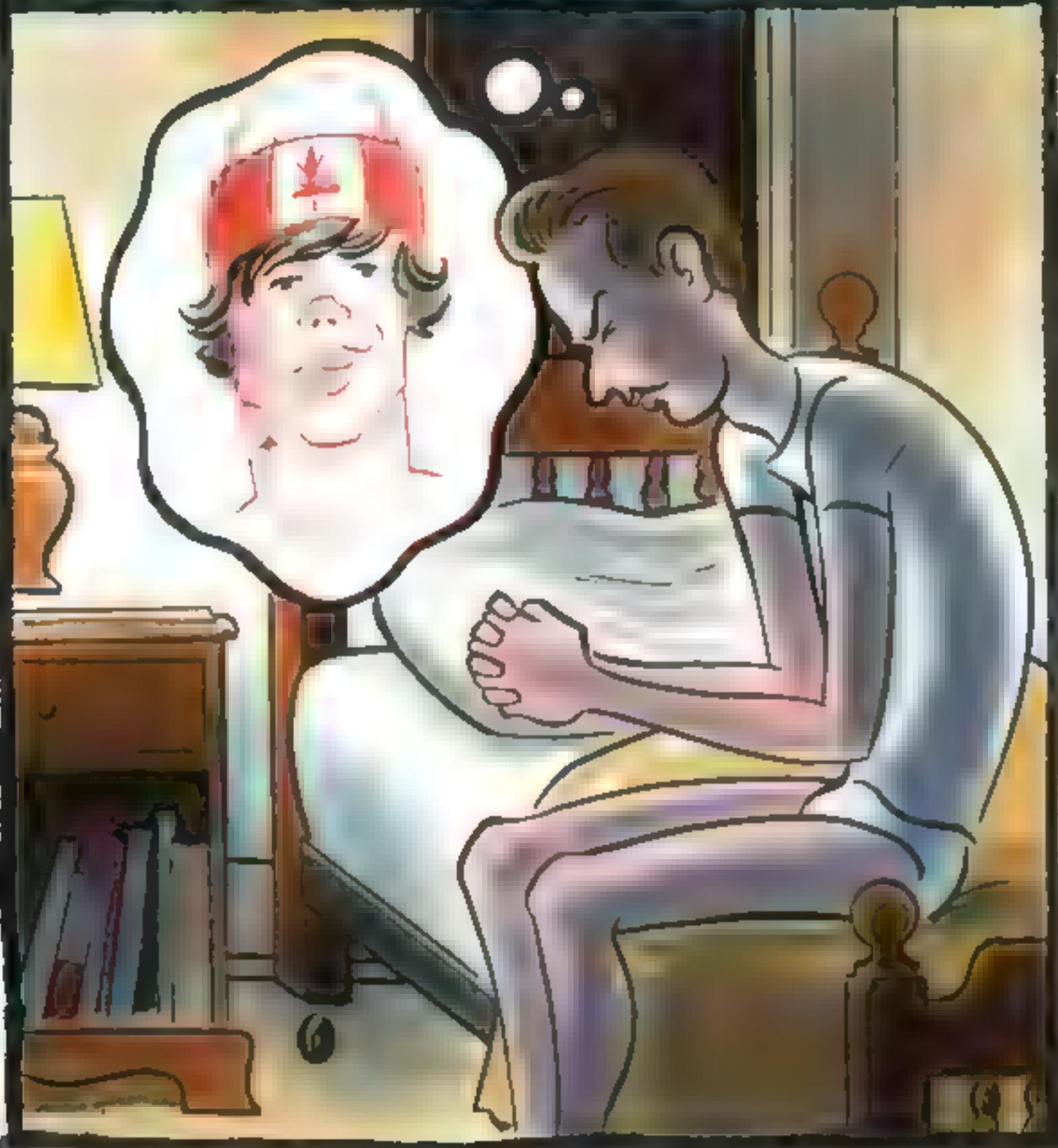
# RESCUE



In 1985 I was a prickly, arrogant, depressed, naive, horny, scared, closeted, virgin art student with vertiginous expectations of life and love.



I was also a Christian, still living at home with my parents, desperately trying to reconcile my sinful desires with an increasingly shaky faith.



One night, a dream: I am on a leisurely walk through a pastoral field in England in summertime with Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley.



In a long, rambling conversation, (Oscar did most of the talking, naturally) two of the figures I most revered explained everything.



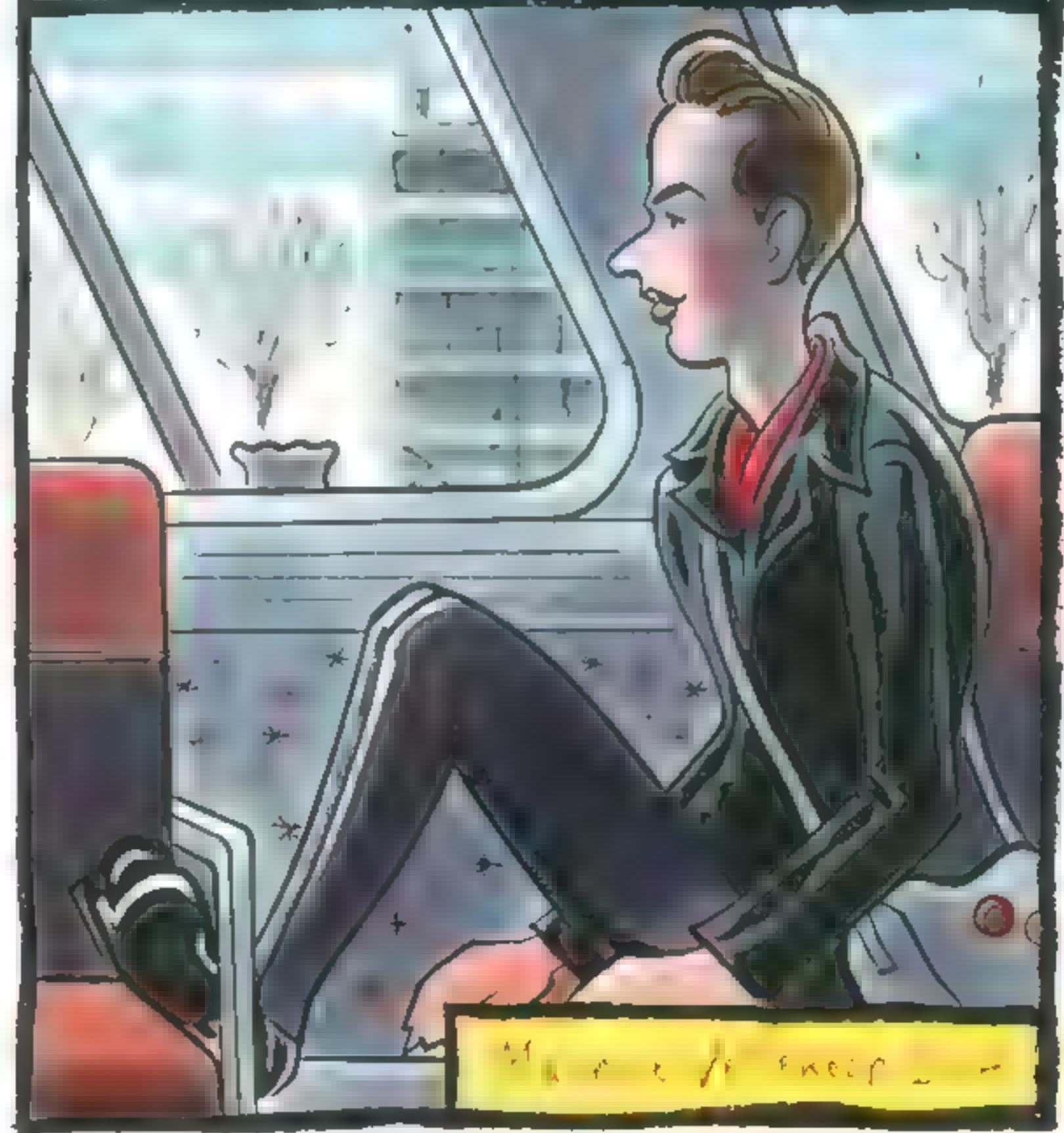
The scene then morphed into a subaqueous encounter with a strapping, handsome farmhand straight out of D.H. Lawrence.



I awoke becalmed, settled. Something had shifted. Whatever the future held in store, I felt that just maybe I would be alright.



They'd rescued me. My queer gods had come down from Elysium when I needed them most. (Now if only I could remember what they said.)



For more on Maurice Vellekoop, see overleaf

## Contributors

### Dóra Maurer

is an artist based in Budapest who has worked with photography, film, installation and painting over a career that has spanned 50 years. She has a solo shows at Carl Kostyál, London (through 1 March), and Museum Ritter, Waldenbuch (through 14 April). Her work is also included in *Adventures of the Black Square: Abstract Art and Society 1915–2015* at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, (through 6 April) and the OFF-Biennale, Budapest (from 24 April). This month she writes on Ádám Kokesch as part of Future Greats.

### Song Dong

is a Beijing-based artist whose work touches on themes of impermanence and social change. Recent solo exhibitions include Baró, São Paulo, Pace Gallery, New York, The Margulies Collection at the Warehouse, Miami, and Carriageworks, Sydney, in 2013; and in 2012, the Barbican, London. In 2012 his work was also included in Documenta 13, Kassel. This month he writes on Ma Qusha as part of Future Greats.

### Zoe Butt

is a curator and writer. Currently she is executive director and curator of Sàn Art, Ho Chi Minh City – Vietnam's most active independent contemporary art space. This month she writes on Bùi Công Khanh as part of Future Greats.

### Mario García Torres

is an artist based in Mexico City who uses film, photography, slide projections, sound, text, and video. Following his current shows at Proyecto Siqueiros, La Tallera, Cuernavaca (in collaboration with Rodrigo Ortiz Monasterio); Proyectos Monclova, Mexico City (with Ryan Gander); and the Pérez Art Museum, Miami; the artist will have a solo exhibition at Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth from 11 April. This month he writes on Oscar Neustern as part of Future Greats.

### Fernanda Gomes

is a Rio de Janeiro-based artist whose frequently delicate sculptural assemblages are characterised by their use of barely manipulated found and organic material, together with her interest in natural light and the colour white. Recent solo exhibitions include Galeria Luisa Strina in 2014, São Paulo, and the Centre international d'Art et du Paysage de l'Île de Vassivière in 2013. Her work was included in the 13th Istanbul Biennial in 2013 and the 30th Bienal de São Paulo in 2012. This month she writes on Jarbas Lopes as part of Future Greats.

### Contributing Writers

Sara Arrhenius, Andrew Berardini, Neal Brown, Zoe Butt, Barbara Casavecchia, Matthew Collings, Jacquelyn Davis, Kathryn Drake, Chris Fite-Wassilak, Orit Gat, Mario García Torres, Gallery Girl, Fernanda Gomes, Jonathan Griffin, Jonathan Grossmalerman, Graham Harman, Yuko Hasegawa, Stefanie Hessler, Sam Jacob, Gabriela Jauregui, Sarah Jilani, Rashid Johnson, Koyo Kouoh, Phillip Lai, Maria Lind, Dóra Maurer, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, Lucas Ospina, Adriano Pedrosa, Mark Prince, Pavel Pyš, John Quin, Claire Rugby, Dieter Roelstraete, Ed Schad, Song Dong, Raimar Stange, Sam Steverlynck, Jen Thatcher, Dan Udy, Fatoş Üstek, Emily Wakeling, Brienne Walsh, Mike Watson, Siona Wilson

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### Contributing Artists/Photographers

Florian Meisenberg, Luke Norman & Nik Adam, Maurice Vellekoop

## Maurice Vellekoop (preceding pages)

Following along the trail blazed by lesbian cartoonist Alison Bechdel in *Fun Home* (2006) and *Are You My Mother?* (2012), Toronto native Maurice Vellekoop is gestating a combined coming-out and coming-of-age graphic memoir of his own, titled *I'm So Glad We Had This Time Together!*, for Pantheon Books. Among Vellekoop's literary touchstones for his first long-form comic are Paul Monette, Edmund White, Ned Rorem, Oscar Wilde and Jeanette Winterson – "I recently read her *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal*, and was alternately laughing hysterically or in floods of tears."

Understandably, his fraught relationship with his staunchly Calvinist Dutch-immigrant parents underpins both his life and his autobiographical comic. Born in 1964, Vellekoop had a strongly religious upbringing. "Ours was a very devout denomination: church twice on Sundays, Christian school, weekly catechism evening class, the horribly named Daily Vacation Bible School, even a version of Boy Scouts called the Calvinist Cadet Corps (Calvinettes for the girls)."

A late bloomer, Vellekoop faced additional challenges during the early 1980s, when "AIDS was just starting to devastate the community in Toronto. I had many older friends who lost dozens of friends and lovers. Miraculously, I never lost anyone close. I was filled with unresolved guilt and shame at that time, and the addition of fear to that heady mix left me pretty much non-functional in the love/sex department."

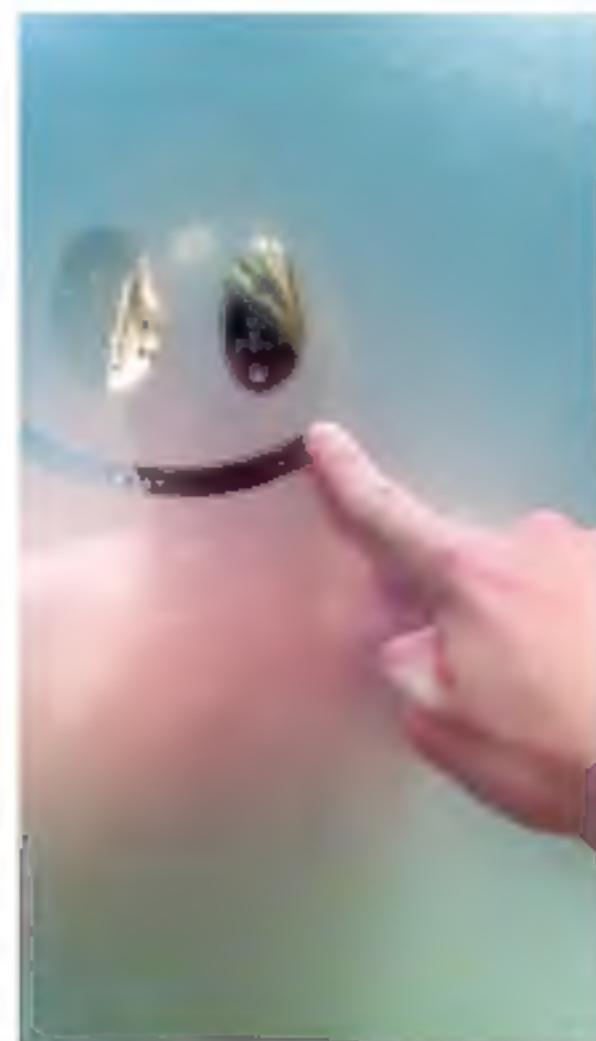
His new Strip for *ArtReview*, 'Rescue', marks his final break from the Christian Reformed Church he grew up in, after Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley come to him in a dream and explain life. Not long after graduating from Ontario College of Art and Design, Vellekoop's career took off as a widely-commissioned illustrator, including his comics compendia *Vellevision* (1998), *A Nut at The Opera* (2006) and *The World of Gloria Badcock* (2011), and his Tom of Finland-inspired homoerotic picture books *Pin-Ups* (2009) and *ABC Book* (1997) and two editions of *A Men's Room Reader: Artist and Models* (2000) and *Big Business* (2000).

After a showing last summer at Twenty Twenty Two in Manchester, this year, his first solo European exhibition, *Cockadoodle: The Erogenous Art of Maurice Vellekoop*, comes to Space Station Sixty-Five in London (through 2 May). "The show is mostly my queer erotica, including *Transworld*, an unpublished sequential series about a trans Korean stewardess. There's also a brief excerpt of sketched pages from my memoir, showing an awkward sexual encounter."

For several years, Vellekoop has been making his private fantasies and private life public, and yet he still harbours some concerns about how his mother will react to his graphic novel. "She is now a very sheltered, elderly Christian lady, who would be shocked and repelled by the level of candour that most people take for granted today. While I have managed to publish erotica she's never seen, my fear is my graphic novel will be successful and people start contacting her for her thoughts!"

Paul Gravett

Editorial	Publishing	Production	ArtReview Ltd
<i>Editor-in-Chief</i> Mark Rappolt	<i>Publisher</i> Patrick Kelly patrickkelly@artreview.com	<i>Production Director</i> Allen Fisher allenfisher@artreview.com	<i>ArtReview</i> is published by ArtReview Ltd 1 Honduras Street London EC1Y 0TH T 44 (0)20 7490 8138
<i>Editor</i> David Terrien	<i>Galleries</i>	<i>Operations Executive</i> Letizia Resta letiziaresta@artreview.com	<i>Chairman</i> Dennis Hotz
<i>Associate Editors</i> J.J. Charlesworth Martin Herbert Jonathan T.D. Neil	<i>UK and Australasia</i> Alison Reisner alisonreisner@artreview.com	<i>Distribution Consultant</i> Adam Long adam.ican@btinternet.com	<i>Managing Director</i> Debbie Shorten
<i>Senior Editor, Web Editor</i> Helen Sumpter	<i>Benelux, France, Southern Europe and Latin America</i> Moky May mokymay@artreview.com	<i>Finance</i>	<i>Subscriptions</i>
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<i>Copy Editor</i> Hettie Judah	<i>Asia, Middle East and Russia</i> Florence Dinar florence.dinar@artreview.com		
<i>Editorial Assistant</i> Louise Darblay	<i>Lifestyle</i>		
<i>Art Direction</i> John Morgan studio	<i>Stacey Langham</i> stacey.langham@artreview.com		
<i>Designers</i> Julien Savioz Pedro Cid Proenca office@artreview.com	<i>Charlotte Regan</i> charlotte.regan@artreview.com		



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### on the cover

Florian Meisenberg, *Life During Wartime*, 2012 (still),  
single-channel video, 1 min 33 sec.  
Courtesy the artist & Wentrup, Berlin

### on pages 154 and 162

photography by Luke Norman & Nik Adam

## Text credits

Phrases on the spine and on pages 33 and 121 are from the short story 'No Oil Painting', featured in *The Six Million Dollar Man Annual 1977*.  
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Early spring and I find myself back at work at Jean-Pierre's gallery. A Frenchman in his late fifties, Jean-Pierre claims to have been in Art Basel during the 'old days' when Lorenzo Rudolf was cutting his admirably symmetrical teeth there. Since then, the slide has been gradual but unstoppable.

"Gallery Girl! It's good to have you back. I have to do something to turn the gallery around. Is that a Banjo & Matilda cashmere hooded top you've got on?"

I flick the hood off my head and give Jean-Pierre a playful slap on his French *derrière*.

"You've still got a great eye, Jean-Pierre, and a top ass for an old guy," I reply. "How did it all go so wrong?"

"I don't know, GG. One year ago I was in Art Basel, now I face oblivion. Or even worse, a medium-size booth next to Opera Gallery at next year's Art Stage Singapore."

We both stare blankly out the window, contemplating the horror of it all.

"Even worse," Jean-Pierre continues, "the artists who still bring in the money for my gallery are awful: a couple of neo-expressionists; a Chinese guy churning out paintings of smiling women. I've even got one of the Glasgow School and an Aboriginal ground-painter. The detritus of the fag-end of the last century."

"Christ almighty." I shake my head sadly.

"I need young artists!" he shouts. "I need the type who feature in your magazine's Future Greats!"

"It's not my magazine any more," I say quietly. "That's why I'm here."

Jean-Pierre looks like he's about to ask why, but he sees the look on my face and pauses. It's too painful to go into the details of the party thrown in honour of last year's Future Greats, the troupe of dwarves I hired to appear from under the large table in the private room we'd organised, and the misunderstanding after which one of them lashed himself to the CEO of a (now former) major advertiser for a couple of painful hours.

"But that's so lame, Jean-Pierre. Everyone is chasing the future, but what does it mean? What is the future? What was the future? This was the future!" I upturn my Tod's D-Cube Bauletto medium leather tote on Jean-Pierre's desk, and the contents spill out – a Nokia 8110 'banana phone', Robert Hughes's *The Shock of the New* and a copy of *Charlie Hebdo*.

Jean-Pierre picks up the phone thoughtfully, sliding the bottom half of it out and in again.

"Neo brandished that banana phone in *The Matrix*," I continue "And we thought that's what phones would look like. But do they? No! And what of the Wachowskis today? *Jupiter Fucking Ascending*? I ask you!"

I pick up the Hughes book and start reading aloud from it.

"What does one prefer? An art that struggles to change the social contract, but fails? Or one that seeks to please and amuse, and succeeds?" I shout.

"Erm, the pleasing and amusing one?" offers Jean-Pierre, seemingly a little confused.

"No! No! Art must break the social contract, Jean-Pierre! That's what that old fucker Hughes was saying. Why should us gallerists be handmaidens delivering produce for gimmicks like Future Greats? Why should we crawl our way back to the margins of respectability by begging for a small booth on the outer fringes of the Armory? Let us instead revel in being the marginalised and the dispossessed of the artworld! Let's relaunch the Aborigine! The guy from Glasgow! Let's do Pulse New York! Let us do a *Charlie Hebdo* on ArtReview and this whole on-trend shebang! The advertisers didn't like the dwarf bondage – wait until they see what I'm going to unleash now!"

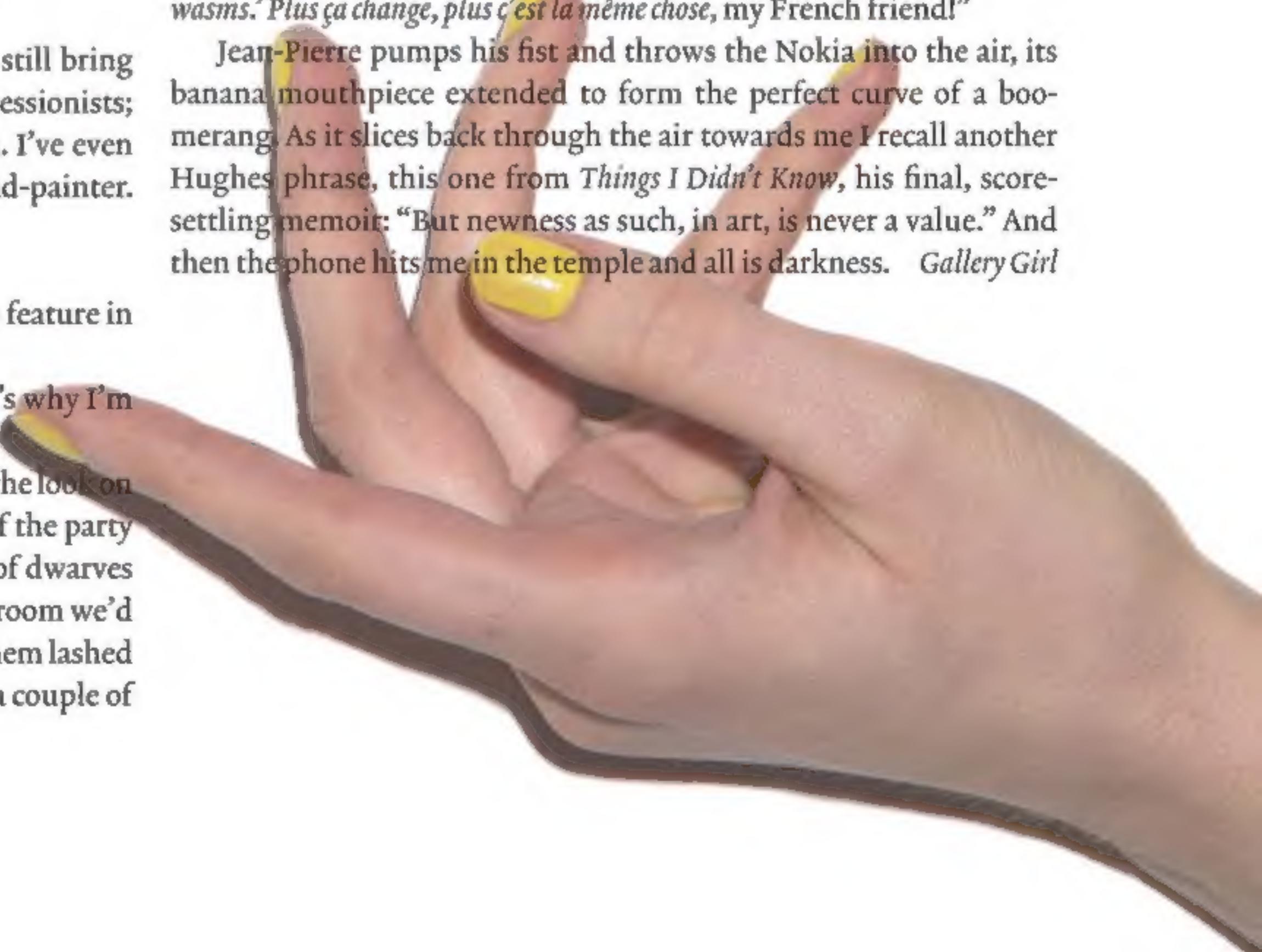
"You mean that we are Charlie?"

"No, Jean-Pierre. They are Charlie. We'll have to be, you know, erm, the other lot."

"I can't do that! I am a middle-aged Frenchman, I have to be Charlie. *Je suis Charlie!*"

"Look, forget Charlie." I stuff the magazine back into my Tod's. "What does Hughes say? 'Movements belonged to the sixties – Op, Pop, Colour-Field, Minimalism and so on. By 1975 all the *isms* were wasms.' *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*, my French friend!"

Jean-Pierre pumps his fist and throws the Nokia into the air, its banana mouthpiece extended to form the perfect curve of a boomerang. As it slices back through the air towards me I recall another Hughes phrase, this one from *Things I Didn't Know*, his final, score-settling memoir: "But newness as such, in art, is never a value." And then the phone hits me in the temple and all is darkness. *Gallery Girl*



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# Isa Genzken

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The Dior logo is displayed in a stylized, serif font. The letters are black with a thin white outline. A branch with vibrant, multi-colored flowers (including shades of blue, yellow, and orange) and a butterfly with similar patterns is woven through the letters, particularly the 'D' and 'i'.